

# COLD CASES

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**Hélène Katz**

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# COLD CASES

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Famous Unsolved *Mysteries,*  
Crimes, and Disappearances  
in America

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Hélène Katz



GREENWOOD

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# Preface

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The popularity of such American television series as *Law & Order* and *CSI*, where cases are neatly solved in one-hour episodes, may lead viewers to gain an unrealistic expectation that every crime can—and will—be solved. *Cold Cases* helps to address this issue and give readers a better understanding of criminal investigations by taking them through cases from when the crime was committed to where the police investigation reached a dead end.

This book examines 40 well-known cases of unsolved murders and suspicious disappearances in North America over a period of more than 160 years, from the death of Mary Rogers in 1841 to the bombing death of Brian Wells in 2003. Every case, except for two involving Americans who met their demise in the Canadian Arctic, occurred in the United States. Cases are organized chronologically to give readers some insight into the evolution of criminal investigation techniques and forensics since the 1840s. The book uses an engaging yet authoritative tone to make the topic more accessible to high school, undergraduate, and community college students as well as members of the public.

Each essay of *Cold Cases* describes a murder or disappearance and the circumstances surrounding it, provides background about the victim, takes readers through the investigation, and explains how police excluded possible suspects before reaching an impasse. Some essays that appear later in the book, such as the case of the Zodiac Killer and hijacker D. B. Cooper, also include details of how modern forensic techniques were applied to a cold case in the hope of finding new leads. The final one focuses on the story of Brian Wells, in which a man was convicted in connection with the case four years later. The trail sometimes

goes cold, only to heat up again and lead to a conviction. Thanks to the continuous evolution of modern forensics, what was once impossible (such as identification through DNA evidence) is now possible. Also included is a timeline of when certain forensic techniques were developed, which will help readers better understand how criminal investigation tools and methods have evolved over the past 160 years and their impact on how cases are handled by police.

# Timeline: Milestones in Forensics

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- 1248 The Chinese text *The Washing Away of Wrongs* (*Hsi Duan Yu*) describes the differences between death by drowning and death by strangulation. This was the first known application of medical knowledge to forensics.
- 1609 François Demelle publishes the first work on the examination of questioned documents.
- 1686 Marcello Malpighi, anatomy professor at the University of Bologna, is the first person to describe human fingerprints.
- 1775 Swedish chemist Karl Wilhelm Scheele finds a way to detect large quantities of arsenic in the body.
- 1784 In one of the first cases where physical evidence is matched and used to find a killer, John Toms is convicted of murder in Lancaster, England, after police find a torn piece of paper in his pocket that matches a piece that was found in his victim.
- 1813 Mathieu Bonaventure Orfila publishes the first formal treatment of toxicology in *Traité des poisons*, also called *Toxicologie générale*. He becomes the father of modern toxicology.
- 1823 German anatomy professor John Evangelist Purkinje publishes a thesis describing nine fingerprint patterns.
- 1835 Scotland Yard's Henry Goddard compares the unique markings of a bullet used in a murder to match it with one belonging to a killer. It is the first time bullet comparison is used to catch a murderer.

- 1836 English chemist James Marsh develops a test that could detect the presence of arsenic in tissues. At a murder trial he confirms arsenic as the victim's cause of death.
- 1839 Henri-Louis Bayard publishes the first reliable procedures for the microscopic detection of sperm.
- 1840 Mathieu Bonaventure Orfila applies the Marsh Test in the murder of Charles Lafarge and detects arsenic in the body. His widow Marie Lafarge is sentenced to life in prison.
- 1851 Britain passes the Arsenic Act to curb the poison's availability.
- 1853 Ludwig Karol Teichmann, a Polish anatomist, develops a scientific test to detect the presence of blood in unidentified stains on clothes and other items.
- 1858 Sir William James Herschel begins using fingerprints on contracts to authenticate them. He soon begins to notice that fingerprints are distinctive to each person and don't change over time.
- 1880 Dr. Henry Faulds recognizes the value of fingerprints for purposes of identification and in criminal investigations.
- 1887 Arthur Conan Doyle publishes his first story about Sherlock Holmes.
- 1889 Jean Alexandre Lacassagne is the first person to note that gun barrels make unique marks on bullets that could help match a bullet to the gun that fired it. His comparisons are based on the number of lands and grooves that each one makes.
- 1892 British anthropologist Sir Francis Galton publishes the first book about fingerprints. He describes the individual patterns within prints and argued that fingerprints are particular to each person and don't change over the course of a person's lifetime.
- Argentina becomes the first country to use fingerprint identification to solve a crime. Francesca Rojas had killed her two sons and tried to blame the murders on someone else. Her bloody print is found at the crime scene.
- 1893 Hans Gross publishes *Criminal Investigation*, the first comprehensive book about the use of physical evidence to solve crimes.
- 1897 Sir Edward Henry develops a classification system for fingerprints based on five types of points.

- 1901 Karl Landsteiner identifies the existence of four major blood groups and develops a classification system. He is awarded the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1930.  
Paul Uhlenhuth develops a test that distinguishes human blood from animal blood.
- 1902 In the first court case involving firearms evidence, Oliver Wendell Holmes identifies a particular gun as being the murder weapon.
- 1903 The New York State prison system becomes the first law enforcement agency in the United States to start using fingerprints to identify criminals.
- 1905 U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt establishes the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- 1910 Victor Balthazard, a professor of forensic medicine at the Sorbonne in Paris, and Marcelle Lambert publish the first comprehensive study of hairs. Rosella Rousseau confesses to murdering Germaine Bichon in one of the first cases involving hairs.
- 1911 Thomas Jennings becomes the first American to be convicted based on fingerprint evidence. He is convicted of murder, and the decision is upheld on appeal.
- 1915 Leone Lattes develops a method for determining the blood group of a dried bloodstain.
- 1916 Albert Schneider develops a vacuum apparatus to collect trace evidence.
- 1920 Edmond Locard, the director of a crime laboratory in France, develops Locard's Exchange Principle, one of the most important rules of collecting evidence. It states that "every contact leaves a trace." That is, there will always be a trace of evidence when there is contact between two items, such as fingerprints, hairs, or gunshot residue, for example. Charles Waite catalogues the manufacturing data of weapons.
- 1920s Calvin Goddard, Charles Waite, Philip Gravelle, and John Fisher perfect the comparison microscope, which allows two bullets to be laid side by side for a comparative exam.
- 1921 John Larson and Leonarde Keeler design the portable polygraph machine.

- 1923 In *Frye v. United States*, the District of Columbia Circuit Court rules that polygraph test results are inadmissible in court.
- 1924 Los Angeles police chief August Vollmer sets up the first police crime laboratory in the United States.
- 1929 Calvin Goddard plays a key role in founding the Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.
- 1930 The *American Journal of Police Science* is founded.
- 1932 A crime lab is created at the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- 1933 Teodoro Gonzales of the Criminal Identification Laboratory in Mexico City introduces a test to the United States that can be used to detect gunshot residue.
- 1937 German Walter Specht, from the University Institute for Legal Medicine and Scientific Criminalistics in Jena, develops the chemical luminol to help detect latent blood stains.
- 1945 Frank Lundquist, from the Legal Medicine Unit at the University of Copenhagen, develops the acid phosphatase test for semen evidence.
- 1950 Max Frei-Sulzer develops the tape lift method of collecting trace evidence. It allows for particles to be lifted from surfaces using tape and examined under a microscope.
- 1953 James Watson and Francis Crick publishes a landmark paper identifying the structure of DNA. They receive the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1962.
- 1954 R. F. Borkenstein, captain of the Indiana State Police, invents the Breathalyzer machine for field sobriety testing.
- 1959 The American Board of Pathology recognizes forensic pathology.  
H. C. Harrison and R. Gilroy introduces a chemical test to detect the presence of barium, antimony, and lead on the hands of people who fired firearms.
- 1962 Lawrence George Kersta, a New Jersey audio engineer, refines the technique of voiceprint identification.
- 1972 Canadian serial killer Wayne Clifford Boden becomes the first person in North America to be convicted using the relatively new science of forensic dentistry. He was nicknamed the Vampire Rapist because he would bite the breasts of his victims.

- 1975 Congress enacts into law the Federal Rules of Evidence, which are originally promulgated by the U.S. Supreme Court.
- 1977 The FBI introduces the Automated Fingerprint Identification System that computerizes scans of fingerprints. The International Association for Identification establishes a certification program for fingerprint experts.
- 1984 Sir Alec Jeffreys of the University of Leicester, England, develops the first DNA profiling test.
- 1986 DNA fingerprinting is used for the first time to convict a man, Colin Pitchfork, who murdered two girls in the United Kingdom.
- 1987 Tommy Lee Andrews becomes the first person in the United States to be convicted with the help of DNA profiling. He had committed a series of rapes in Orlando, Florida.
- 1991 Montreal's Walsh Automation Inc. develops the Integrated Ballistics Identification System (IBIS), an automated imaging system that compares the marks left behind by bullets, cartridge cases, and shells.  
Alan Legere becomes the first Canadian to be convicted as a result of DNA evidence. He murdered four people after he escaped from prison.
- 1993 Kirk Bloodsworth becomes the first person on death row to be exonerated of murder using DNA evidence.
- 1994 The Royal Canadian Mounted Police uses DNA testing on a cat called Snowball to link a man to the killing of his former wife. It is the first time that non-human DNA is used to identify a criminal.
- 1996 In *Tennessee v. Ware*, mitochondrial DNA typing is first admitted in a U.S. court.
- 2003 The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada formally recognize forensic pathology.



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PRICE, 10 CENTS.

THE  
**BEAUTIFUL  
CIGAR GIRL;**



OR,

**The Mysteries of Broadway.**

BY

J. H. INGRAHAM, Esq.,

author of "The Young Ranger Hussar," "Frank Rivers; or, The Dangers of the Town," "Theodore; or, The Child of the Sea," "Estelle; or, The Conspirator of the Isles," "The Surf Skiff; or, The Heroine of the Kennebec," etc., etc.

The death of Mary Rogers gave rise to the penny press in the 1840s. Brown University Library.

# The Cigar Girl: The Death of Mary Rogers (1841)

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*The death of Mary Rogers marked the rise of tabloids, known in the 1840s as the penny press. The media covered almost every clue that emerged and possible suspects believed to be linked to Rogers. They used her murder to sell newspapers to a growing readership of people from the working class.*

It was a hot and humid day in New York City and 93 degrees in the shade as Mary Cecilia Rogers prepared to go out on Sunday July 25, 1841. She put on a white dress, black shawl, blue scarf, light-colored shoes, and a leghorn hat and grabbed a parasol to protect herself from the rays of the midsummer sun. She lived at the boardinghouse she ran with her mother, Phebe, at 126 Nassau Street in the heart of the city. Phebe, a widow, began renting rooms in 1840 to men who were looking for work in New York City. Boarders included Daniel Payne, William Kiekuck, Alfred Crommelin, and Archibald Padley.

Once she was ready to leave for the day, Rogers knocked on Payne's bedroom door. The cork cutter had come to board in the fall of 1840. He became involved with Rogers soon afterward, and the couple was engaged. Payne was in the midst of shaving when she told him that she was off to visit her aunt, Mrs. Downing, and would return in the evening. As Payne said goodbye, he told his fiancée that he would wait for her at the stagecoach stop on the corner of Broadway and Ann Streets at 7 PM, as he often did when she came home late.

The three-story, red brick boardinghouse on Nassau Street was at the center of the city's newspaper, printing, and publishing industries and located close to City Hall, the port area, and Wall Street. It was quiet, as it usually was on Sundays, when Rogers stepped outside at 10 AM. Shops and taverns were closed until late afternoon, and the streets were empty except for a few churchgoers and those out for an early walk.

About an hour later Payne went to visit his brother, John Payne, and then he headed downtown to join the crowds that gathered on Broadway in the early evening. A storm blew in as he was walking towards Ann Street to meet Rogers at 7 PM. Believing that she would most likely wait out the thunderstorm at her aunt's house for the night, Payne returned to the boardinghouse alone and went to sleep.

It didn't seem unusual to anyone at the boardinghouse when Rogers did not return home first thing the next morning, but by lunchtime that Monday her continuing absence began to worry her mother and Payne. He went to see Mrs. Downing and discovered that Rogers had never

arrived at her aunt's house. He continued to search for his fiancée, but neither friends nor relatives had seen her. He searched from Harlem to Brooklyn, Hoboken to Staten Island, but he found no sign of her. Payne walked into the offices of the *New York Sun* and placed a missing person notice to run in Tuesday's edition of the paper.

It was not the first time that 21-year-old Rogers had disappeared. John Anderson hired the pretty young woman in 1838 to stand behind the counter at his tobacco shop on nearby Broadway, hoping her presence at Anderson's Tobacco Emporium would attract male customers. Gold lettering above the door listed the items for sale inside, including "seegars, fine cut and confections." Rogers became known as "the beautiful seegar girl," and the shop became a popular hangout for authors, editors, and newspaper reporters.

One day in October 1838 Rogers failed to show up for work. She reappeared two weeks later, saying that she had been resting with friends in Brooklyn because she "felt tired." She was surprised by the amount of interest that her disappearance had generated. A rumor began circulating that Rogers had been seen in the company of a tall and handsome naval officer during her absence. She never returned to work for Anderson.

\* \* \*

## SEARCH FOR MARY ROGERS

Two days after Rogers disappeared on July 25, 1841, Payne continued to search for his fiancée. He heard that a young woman matching Rogers's description had been seen at a pub for several hours on the day that she disappeared. He spoke to the keeper of the pub, but was no closer to finding her. After finding no trace of her during a second trip to Hoboken, he returned to the city in early afternoon. Payne went to the shop where he worked as a cork cutter and went home at 7 PM.

The next morning Crommelin joined the search. He had lived at the Rogers boardinghouse from December 7, 1840, until June 1841. He moved out after Rogers rejected him in favor of his fellow boarder Payne. Just before she disappeared, Rogers left a rose in the keyhole of Crommelin's office door. Although he found out on Monday that Rogers hadn't returned home, he didn't start looking for her until he saw the newspaper advertisement about her disappearance on Wednesday. He spoke to Phebe to confirm her daughter's disappearance.

Crommelin then joined the search with his friend Padley, who had also once roomed at the Rogers boardinghouse. They took one of the steamboats that frequently crossed the Hudson River from New York City to Hoboken. After disembarking near a hotel and tavern, it was a short walk to the Elysian Fields, a scenic spot of about four or five acres that was surrounded on three sides by trees and looked towards the river on the fourth side. In the 1840s it was a popular spot for city dwellers to get away to the country. It was also home to a popular “refreshment house” known as Nick Moore’s House.

On that sweltering afternoon of July 28, 1841, James Boulard and Henry Mallin were walking along the shore near a part of Hoboken known as Sybil’s Cave. As they looked out across the Hudson River, one of the men spotted a body floating in the water about 200 or 300 yards from where they were standing. Boulard and Mallin raced to the Elysian Fields dock, jumped into a boat, and rowed quickly towards it. As they got closer, they realized it was the fully dressed body of a young woman. They tried several times unsuccessfully to fish the body out of the river, and finally they tied a rope around the dead woman and dragged her back to shore behind the boat. At the same time, John Bertram, William Waller, and a man named Luther spotted what they initially thought were clothes as they cruised by in their sailboat.

By the time Boulard and Mallin had reached the shore with their cargo, a crowd had gathered. The men laid the woman’s body down on the beach. As people pressed forward to gawk, Crommelin, who had joined the growing crowd, leaned forward and realized he was staring at the body of Mary Rogers. She was still wearing the same clothes that she had put on three days earlier: a flowered bonnet, blue dress, petticoat, pantalettes, stockings, and garters. But her face was badly beaten, she had strips of lace from her petticoat tied around her neck in a sailor’s knot, and her body was bruised and waterlogged.

Rogers’s body was transported from the beach to the village of Hoboken, where county coroner Dr. Richard F. Cook performed an autopsy. He concluded that the “beautiful seegar girl” had been beaten, gagged, strangled, and raped (perhaps repeatedly) before being thrown into the Hudson River. He also said that her face was swollen and that there was a mark about the size and shape of a man’s thumb on the right side of her neck and two or three marks on the left side that resembled the shape of a man’s fingers. Marks appeared to indicate that her wrists had been tied together and her dress was torn. Blood was still seeping from her mouth. There were no signs that Rogers was pregnant.

Crommelin identified the body and stayed with it until the coroner had completed his investigation. By then it was nearly 9 PM and the ferries had stopped operating for the day. Crommelin stayed at the Jersey City Hotel and returned to New York City in the morning, bringing news of Rogers's death and some pieces of her clothing, including flowers from her hat, a garter, the bottom of her pantalette, and a curl of her hair. Phebe Rogers confirmed they belonged to her daughter. A grieving Phebe closed up her boardinghouse and moved in with her sister.

## FRENZY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

It was so hot that Rogers's body was quickly buried in Hoboken, New Jersey, within hours of being found to prevent it from decomposing further. But her story did not die after her burial. Instead, it grew once New York City newspapers began covering the murder on August 1, 1841, four days after her body was found and a week after she had vanished. It was more than the lurid details of her death that captivated reporters and editors. Rogers, who was known as the "Beautiful Seegar Girl," had waited on many of them when she worked at Anderson's Tobacco Emporium.

Newly emerging tabloid newspapers—known as the penny press—went into a frenzy with their coverage of the unsolved murder. More respectable newspapers followed. As author Amy Srebnick noted in her book, the *New York Herald* said that "a young and beautiful girl has been seduced and murdered within hail of this populous place." The *New York Tribune* noted that "The horrible murder of Miss Rogers excites daily a deeper and wider interest in our city." The case changed the way in which the press covered homicides, and they began reporting virtually every clue and possible suspect in the case, which helped to sell newspapers. For example, the *Herald* published the lengthy details of the coroner's report on August 17, 1841.

Newspapers also floated theories about the circumstances surrounding Rogers's death. They speculated that she had been brutally raped and killed by one of the urban gangs that roamed the streets of New York City; that she had been killed by one of her beaux; that her death was a suicide; and even that she had not died but merely disappeared and that the body that was found belonged to some other unfortunate young woman. The coverage sparked competition among the media outlets and generated public interest in the story. Members of the public went to Sybil's Cave to see where Rogers's body had been found.

The newspapers also called for more involvement by police and other government officials in what they felt was a dragging official investigation. *Herald* editor James Gordon Bennett set up a citizen's committee to complain about what his group felt was a slow response to the murder by the police and government officials and to offer a reward for information leading to arrests in the case. New York governor William Seward subsequently added to the reward money.

Meanwhile, police argued over the jurisdiction of the investigation, which centered on where each side believed she had been murdered. New Jersey authorities said that New York City police should investigate because, they claimed, Rogers had been killed in New York and her body was dumped into the Hudson River before drifting into the New Jersey area. However, New York City police said that New Jersey should lead the investigation because Rogers had been murdered off Hoboken, discovered near the community, and buried there.

## POLICE INVESTIGATION

The investigation dragged and advanced little while the two sides wrangled. Newspapers pointed out that regardless of where Mary Rogers had been killed, she was a New York resident. City officials finally bowed to public pressure and took on the case. At the request of New York City's acting mayor, Rogers's body was exhumed from her grave in Hoboken on Wednesday August 11, 1841, and brought to the Dead House at City Hall Park in New York City. Although the New Jersey coroner had determined that the cause of death was strangulation, the New York City coroner registered the cause of death as a drowning. Rogers was finally buried without ceremony at the cemetery of the West Presbyterian Church.

The New York City police investigation into the murder finally went into full swing. They received information that Rogers was seen in the company of an unidentified man in the hours before her disappearance. In an effort to find him, police questioned several men, including Payne, former boarders Crommelin and Kiekuck, as well as Joseph Morse and her former employer John Anderson.

Newspapers almost immediately cast suspicion on Rogers's fiancé Daniel Payne. He quickly went to the offices of the *New York Times* and *Evening Star* to show sworn affidavits from witnesses attesting to his whereabouts on the day Rogers disappeared. Police noted that the lace around the victim's neck had been tied in a seaman's knot, and

suspicion fell on sailor and former boarder William Kiekuck. At the time, the law allowed police to hold suspects for days without being charged. Arresting people first and then finding evidence against them afterwards was not unusual. Police arrested Kiekuck on suspicion of being involved in Rogers's death, but witnesses provided a credible alibi for his whereabouts between the Sunday that Rogers disappeared and the Tuesday when he boarded the *USS North Carolina* in the harbor.

Then police turned their attention to wood engraver Joseph Morse, who worked on Nassau Street and had apparently been seen with Mary Rogers the same evening that she disappeared. The morning after she vanished, Morse had a violent fight with his wife and fled town. Police tracked him down and found him living under an assumed name in Boylston, Massachusetts. They arrested him and brought him back to New York by steamboat for questioning. He said that he had, indeed, spent the night with a woman named Mary. He was released a few days later, after a woman named Mary Haviland came forward and said that she was the woman he had been with on Staten Island the day that Mary Rogers disappeared. In fact, he tried unsuccessfully to seduce her in a hotel room, she recounted.

John Anderson, Rogers's former employer, was also questioned. However, his statements to police were not splashed across the pages of New York newspapers, unlike those of other men whom police questioned. Perhaps this was intended to protect him because of his position and influence. Having run out of leads, the police investigation stalled momentarily.

## NEW CLUES UNEARTHED

At the end of August, two boys found a small opening in a thicket that led into a cramped cave not far from where Rogers's body was found. On four stones were draped a silk scarf, white petticoat, parasol, and a mildewed linen handkerchief with the initials M. R. The boys picked up the items and brought them to their mother, Frederika Loss, who was the innkeeper of Nick Moore's House near the Elysian Fields. She turned over the clothing to police.

Then a stagecoach driver came forward and said that he thought he had seen Rogers arrive on the Hoboken ferry with a well-dressed man who had a dark complexion. He said they had gone to a tavern kept by Mrs. Loss. When questioned by police, Loss said she remembered them coming in for a drink and then leaving and wandering off into



the woods. She said she later heard a scream but didn't pay attention to it because Sundays often bring people with rowdy behavior. The discovery of the clothes increased interest in the case for a few weeks.

On October 8, 1841, Daniel Payne left New York City and wandered around the Hoboken area in a drunken state. Two New Yorkers were out walking when they found him lying on the ground near the thicket where his fiancée's clothes had been found. He was drunk and had an empty bottle of laudanum beside him. He lost consciousness quickly and died. A note in his pocket read: "To the World—Here I am on the spot: God forgive me for my misfortune in my misspent time." He had committed suicide. His friends and his brother John said that he had been devastated by Rogers's death and drank heavily.

### ALLEGED CONFESSION

Interest in the case waned again until the fall of 1842. Innkeeper Frederika Loss was accidentally shot by one of her three sons while he was handling a loaded gun. As she lay dying, she called Justice Gilbert Merritt of New Jersey to her bedside. He had questioned her previously because he believed that she provided abortions or allowed her inn to be used by doctors for that purpose. He suspected that Rogers had died there during a botched abortion and that Loss's sons had disposed of the body.

Loss told Merritt that Rogers came to her house on Sunday, July 25, 1841, with a young doctor who performed an abortion. Rogers died of complications while under the physician's care, and Loss's sons dropped the body into the river at night where it would be found. Her clothes were scattered in the woods, where they were later located. The confession was questioned because it failed to explain the thumb and finger marks that the coroner had found around Rogers's neck. Loss's sons were questioned, but they refused to corroborate their mother's confession and the case was dropped.

Was Rogers murdered or did she die following an abortion? The case has never been solved, but it marked the rise of tabloids, which used the death of Mary Rogers to sell newspapers to a growing readership of working-class men and women. Papers such as the *New York Herald*, the *Evening Post*, and the *Tribune* competed with one another as they followed every lead in the case and published coroners' reports and depositions. The city's growing printing and publishing industry used it

to give rise to commercial novels, serialized detective stories, and graphic portrayals of Mary Rogers.

American poet and short story writer Edgar Allan Poe subsequently wrote *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, a fictionalized account based on the murder of Mary Rogers. His story appeared in three parts in *Snowden's Ladies' Companion*, in November and December 1842 and in February 1843. In the story, his fictional detective character named C. Auguste Dupin tries to solve the crime. Poe relied heavily on media coverage from the rising “penny press” as the source of his information about the Rogers murder. The death of the “beautiful seegar girl” marked an early example of how the media seized on a gruesome crime to boost its circulation.

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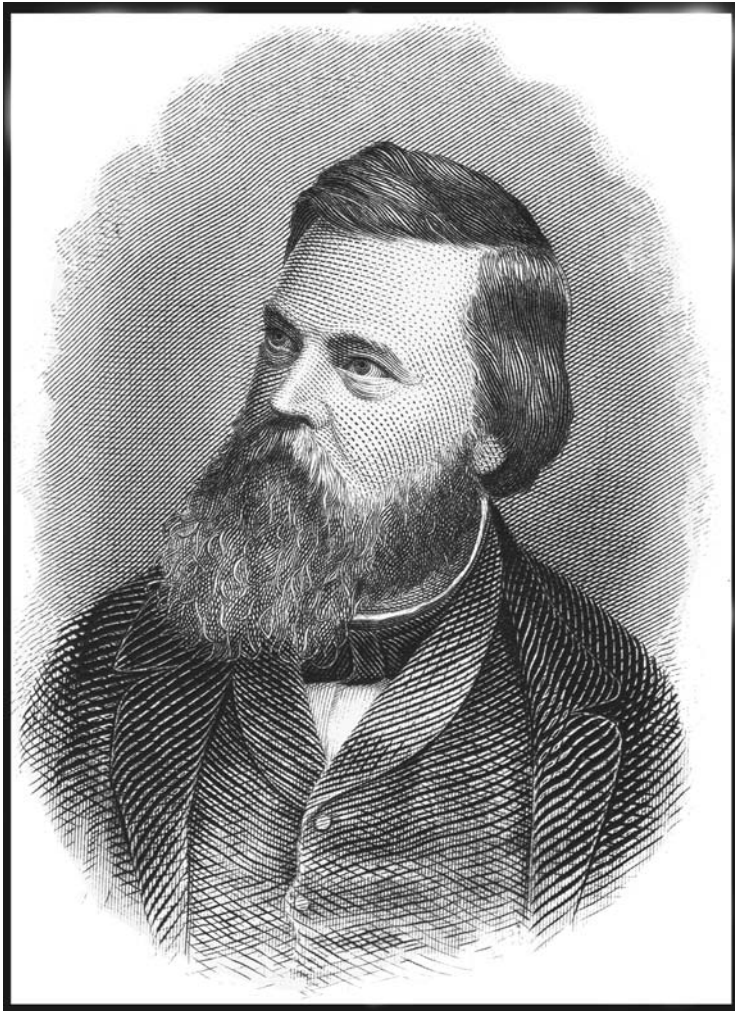
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Charles Francis Hall's Arctic voyages were inspired by Sir John Franklin's ill-fated expedition. G. M. Robeson, ed. *Narrative of the North Polar Expedition. U.S. Ship Polaris, Captain Charles Francis Hall Commanding*, 1876.

# Polar Poisoning: The Death of Charles Francis Hall (1871)

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*Charles Francis Hall died aboard a ship wedged in the Arctic ice, amid a crew rife with discord. It wasn't until modern forensics were applied to this case nearly 100 years later that the true cause of Hall's death was finally uncovered.*

Charles Francis Hall, a man with neither sailing nor military experience, was an unlikely Arctic explorer. He was born in Vermont in 1821, and the family moved to Rochester, New Hampshire, when he was a child. He dropped out of high school and apprenticed as a blacksmith, and then as an engraver. In 1849, at the age of 27, he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, with his wife, Mary, and began working in a seal engraving shop. Cincinnati was a commercial and industrial city, and a booming one at the time, with almost 200,000 residents.

By the time his daughter Anna was born in 1855, Hall was publishing two small newspapers. He soon became fascinated with the Arctic and the lost Franklin expedition in particular. British Royal Navy commander Sir John Franklin had left England in 1845 with two ships, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, to find the Northwest Passage. Franklin and his men vanished somewhere in the Arctic during their journey. Subsequent efforts by British and American expeditions failed to find any survivors, but they did locate some relics and the graves of three crewmen on Beechey Island. The stories captivated Hall.

Hall devoured every newspaper and magazine article and book he could find about the Arctic and earlier expeditions. He flocked to the library to read up about Arctic history and geography, navigation, wildlife, diet, and the challenges of trying to survive in that habitat. He filled the pages of his newspaper, the *Daily Press*, with facts about Franklin and the missing men.

Then in 1859 British explorer Francis McClintock returned from an expedition to the Arctic's King William Island, where he had found some bodies and relics from the Franklin expedition. Hall had no science or navigation background, yet he became convinced that he had a duty to find and rescue any of the men who may have survived Franklin's expedition. He sold his newspaper and decided to organize an expedition to the Arctic.

He began lobbying prominent, wealthy, and influential leaders in Cincinnati for financial support, but that didn't net him enough money to fund his own expedition. The help he really needed lay on the East Coast, where American Arctic explorers and whalers were based, as were men with political and financial connections.

In 1860, Hall left behind his young daughter and pregnant wife in Cincinnati and headed to New York. Using letters of introduction from prominent Ohio leaders, Hall met Henry Grinnell, founder and first president of the American Geographical Society and a patron of American Arctic exploration. For this retired millionaire whaling and shipping magnate, polar expeditions were one of his biggest interests. He had privately funded an expedition in 1849 to find Franklin and one in 1852 by American explorer Elisha Kent Kane.

## ARCTIC BOUND

Grinnell was supportive, but Hall still wasn't able to gather up the funds he needed to mount his own expedition. With Grinnell's help, he managed to gain passage on a whaling ship called the *George Henry* based out of New London, Connecticut. There were faint but persistent rumors that the Franklin survivors were living among the Inuit. Most whites who met the Inuit thought of them as filthy savages. Hall wanted to do something that no other white man had succeeded in doing before him—spend time among the Inuit to learn their language and how they survived in such harsh conditions. The solitude imposed by the Arctic also appealed to his nature.

Hall planned to have the boat drop him off on Baffin Island so that he could spend up to a year living alone with the Inuit. He hoped to perhaps learn their language and customs and then sail a small boat to King William Island to pursue his search for Franklin's men. He called his one-man show the "New Franklin Research Expedition."

Under the command of Captain Sidney O. Budington, the whaler sailed from New London, Connecticut, on May 29, 1860, bound for the Arctic. It anchored at the mouth of what was then called Frobisher Strait in August of that year. The waterway was named for explorer Sir Martin Frobisher, who had discovered it in 1576. Hall had planned to sail through that strait in his small boat to King William Island, but he soon found out what the local Inuit had long known: Frobisher Strait was actually a bay.

On September 27, 1860, a fierce storm shredded Hall's boat and damaged it beyond repair, but Hall remained undeterred. Soon afterward, he met an Inuit couple called Tookolito and Ebierbing, whom whites had named Hannah and Joe. Whalers had met them in the Repulse Bay area in 1855 and had taken them to London. They spent two years in England, where they learned English (Hannah spoke it fluently) and

had tea with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Joe and Hannah agreed to be Hall's guides and interpreters. They helped teach him their language and culture.

In January 1861, Hall joined the Inuit couple for a trip to explore the area around Frobisher Bay. He found and named the Grinnell Glacier, which is 100 miles long and 3,500 feet high. Traveling by dogsled, he lived with the Inuit for the next 43 days. He slept in a snow house and ate whale blubber, an Inuit delicacy known as Muqtuq. He returned to the *George Henry* on February 21, but made two more trips onto the land in the spring.

By mid-July 1861, the *George Henry* was ready to leave the area and head to the whaling grounds. The crew left Hall behind to explore. He rejoined them on September 27, 1861, at Rescue Bay on Cumberland Sound. Captain Budington was surprised to see that he had survived months of living with the Inuit. Locked in by ice on Davis Strait, the whaler was unable to return to the United States that winter. Hall used the time to make a few expeditions throughout the winter, living off the land as the Inuit had taught him. During his forays aboard the ship, however, some of the whalers resented sharing their food with Hall. He went on a hunger strike until Budington finally convinced him to end it.

Nearly a year later, the *George Henry* was finally able to sail again on August 9, 1862. Hall brought Joe and Hannah back with him. When he returned home to Cincinnati, Hall met his young son for the first time. Charles was born in 1860, after his father had left for the Arctic. After more than two years away, the country that Hall knew had changed. The United States was in the grips of a civil war. Sources for funding another Arctic expedition had dried up. He needed to find other sources of financing for his next expedition.

To raise money, Hall wrote a book called *Arctic Researches and Life Among the Esquimaux*, which was published in London in 1864 and New York in 1865. He also gave lectures, bringing Joe and Hannah on the lecture circuit with him. They appeared dressed in their native costumes, which attracted much attention. They were also briefly "rented out" to P. T. Barnum's museum in New York, but their infant son died while they were in New York City.

## SECOND VOYAGE

Hall was still convinced that some of Franklin's men could be living among the Inuit. By July 1, 1864, he had arranged for passage on the

whaler the *Monticello* for himself, Joe, and Hannah. He wanted the *Monticello* to drop him off at Repulse Bay, near the Melville Peninsula, but the captain of the vessel made a mistake and left him far to the south at Depot Island in Roes Welcome Sound. It was too late in the year for Hall to reach Repulse Bay in the coming months. He spent the winter and the next four years living among the Inuit, and kept a journal of the experience.

In August 1866 Hall met whalers who brought him a letter from Henry Grinnell. Enclosed was a message from Lady Franklin encouraging him to continue searching for the missing men from her husband's ill-fated expedition. As Ed Butts cites in his book *Unsolved Mysteries*, she knew that there was no hope for "my own dear husband (who) has long been beyond the reach of all rescue." Hall couldn't persuade the Inuit to go to King William's Island with him to continue his search. A year later, in the fall of 1867, he convinced five whalers to join him. The group, which also included Joe and Hannah, followed every lead the Inuit offered about the fate of Franklin's men, but no clues of any survivors turned up.

On July 31, 1868, Hall accused seaman Patrick Coleman of leading a mutiny against him. The two men argued. Hall later said that Coleman threatened him in the heat of the quarrel. Hall whipped out a pistol and shot him. Coleman lived for an agonizing two weeks while a remorseful Hall tried to nurse him back to health, but Coleman died in his tent on August 14. The other whalers returned to their ship, and Hall was never officially charged in connection with the incident.

Hall reached King William Island in March 1869, accompanied by Joe, Hannah, and a few other Inuit. There he found some relics from the ill-fated Franklin expedition, including a silver spoon bearing Franklin's crest, a piece of mahogany writing desk, fragments of a handkerchief, a pickle jar, planking, copper, and skeletal remains.

Some of the local Inuit told Hall that years earlier they had met a group of about 30 white men heading south and dragging two sledges. They gave the starving men some seal meat, but then left them to fend for themselves as the Inuit continued to move across the land. Hall was angry by what he saw as callousness on the part of the Inuit. He didn't understand that the Inuit were likely living on the edge of starvation themselves and would have endangered their own lives by trying to feed such a large group.

Hall was finally forced to admit that there were no survivors of the Franklin expedition. He set a new goal; on his next Arctic expedition



he would try to reach the North Pole. Hall, Joe, and Hannah boarded a whaling vessel on August 13, 1869, bound for New York.

After Hall returned to the United States, Lady Franklin learned that he had brought back some artifacts from her late husband's expedition. She tried to persuade Hall to return to King William Island on his next expedition and look for her husband's journal. She was certain that it was hidden somewhere on the island, but Hall was a man with a new mission from which he would not be deterred. He told Lady Franklin that he would go back to look for more relics from the Franklin expedition after he had returned from his own expedition to the North Pole.

## EXPEDITION TO THE NORTH POLE

Hall raised money for his next venture by giving lectures and lobbying the U.S. Congress for funding. In July 1870, the Senate Appropriations Committee granted him \$50,000 for one ship. He had hoped to command two. It was too late in the season to go to the Arctic, so he would have to wait another year.

Hall's vessel would be the USS *Periwinkle*, a 387-ton steamer that was completely refitted and renamed the *Polaris*—the official name of the expedition. Hall was given the rank of captain, despite the fact that he lacked the qualifications. He would command the expedition while Captain Sidney O. Buntington was hired to command the ship. Captain George Tyson, whom Hall had met at Frobisher Bay, joined the crew as assistant navigator. The first mate was Hubbard Chester, who had sailed aboard the *Monticello*. William Morton, Elisha Kent Kane's former steward and trusted friend, was made second mate. German engineer Emil Schumann also joined the crew.

Congress had decreed that one of the goals of the expedition was to reach the North Pole, and the other was to study scientifically the different aspects of the North. German physician and naturalist Dr. Emil Bessels was brought in as chief scientist, but he wasn't Hall's first choice. Frederick Meyer, another German, was added to the scientific team as meteorologist. Two of the three scientists picked for the American journey were German.

Half of the *Polaris*'s company was American and the other half was German. Hall selected some of his men while Congress and the army appear to have been the ones who chose the others. According to the book *Unsolved Mysteries*, before he set sail, Hall told the American Geographic Society, "I have chosen my own men; men who will stand

by me through thick and thin. Though we may be surrounded by innumerable icebergs, and though our vessel may be crushed like an egg-shell, I believe they will stand by me to the last.”

The *Polaris* left the Navy yard in Brooklyn, New York, on June 29, 1871. Joe and Hannah and their 12-year-old adopted daughter Punny were aboard. The U.S. Navy ship *Congress* accompanied them to the Arctic Ocean, loaded with additional supplies. Bessels and Meyer wasted little time in challenging the less-educated Hall. Within a week of leaving port, they refused to obey his orders.

For his part, Budington knew more about running a ship than did Hall, but his claim that he knew more about the Arctic as well really irritated Hall. Budington also fought with Tyson, a captain in his own right, and stole food. Hall admonished him. Budington threatened to quit. Dissension spread, as the Americans and Germans onboard did not get along with one another. Disagreements began to divide the men along ethnic lines.

By the time the *Polaris* and the USS *Congress* reached Disco Island off the coast of Greenland, Hall knew that he needed help to address the growing dissention among his crew. He asked Captain Davenport, the commander of the USS *Congress*, to step in. Davenport brought the men together and reminded them of the need to maintain discipline on an expedition.

Hall was in command, he reminded them, and they needed to obey his orders. Davenport also threatened to put German scientist Meyer in irons for insolence and take him back to the United States aboard the USS *Congress*. The Germans on the *Polaris* closed ranks behind their countryman and threatened to quit. Davenport backed down. Instead, he sent in a chaplain to say a prayer with the men, asking God’s blessing for the expedition to the North Pole. He also pleaded for charity, cooperation, and good fellowship among the ship’s occupants.

The USS *Congress* returned to the United States. Not long afterward, Tyson discovered that Budington was now secretly raiding the *Polaris*’s liquor supply. Hall was determined to push towards the North Pole, and he decided to ignore the problem of his light-fingered captain. When the *Polaris* reached Godhaven, Greenland, Hall left his journal and other documents from his second expedition with a local official for safekeeping. Perhaps he sensed disaster ahead?

When the *Polaris* reached Upernavik, Greenland, Hall picked up Inuit Hans Christian Hendrik, who had helped Arctic explorer Elisha Kent Kane. Hendrik brought aboard his wife, three children, and a mass of supplies, including tents, cooking gear, and weapons.

Hall decided to continue the journey by traveling north through the narrow, ice-free waters of Smith Sound that separate Greenland and Ellesmere Island. He believed this channel led to the open polar sea. The *Polaris* left Tesiussuq, the last of Greenland's Inuit settlements, on August 24, 1871. Three days later they entered Smith Sound. Budington wanted to tie up the ship near Etah for the winter. He suggested that sledges be used to complete the expedition to the North Pole, but Hall refused.

In a breach of naval ethics and discipline, Budington went behind Hall's back and ridiculed him to members of the crew as being an amateur and a novice. It was becoming increasingly clear that the man who was responsible for steering the ship northward had little interest in reaching the North Pole. As Hubbard Chester later said, Budington thought the expedition was all "damn nonsense." Some members of the crew were also having second thoughts. Tyson wasn't one of them. He thought that Budington was a coward. In a journal entry, Tyson wrote of him and some of the other men: "I believe some of them think we are going over the edge of the world."

The weather held as the ship traveled farther north than any other expedition had gone before it. Hall was trying to reach the northern tip of Ellesmere Island, but the *Polaris* reached impassable ice at 82 degrees 11 North. The current nearly destroyed the ship as it pushed it back down the channel into what is now Hall Basin. The *Polaris* was moored to an ice floe while the crew held a meeting to discuss whether to try to keep moving north. Tyson and Chester wanted to press on, but Hall agreed with Budington this time. The *Polaris* would go no further. Winter would be setting in soon. The risks to the lives of the crew and the success of the expedition were too high if they continued northward.

The *Polaris* finally stopped for the winter in a small cove on the Greenland coast on September 10, 1871. Hall named the spot Thank God Harbor and planted the American flag. He had not yet reached the North Pole, but it was the most northerly patch of land on which the Stars and Stripes had ever stood. He thought that he could continue on from there to the North Pole by sled. His plan was to have a scouting expedition set off to map out a route, and then he would attempt to reach the Pole in the spring. He left the ship on October 10, with Joe, Hans, and Chester in two sleds pulled by teams of seven dogs each. The group returned two weeks later.

Ice rested under the keel of the *Polaris*, and banks of snow up against the sides provided insulation against the extreme cold. Inside the

cramped quarters, coal stoves kept the temperature warm. When Hall returned to the ship from his two-week scouting mission, he asked for a cup of coffee. Almost immediately after drinking it, Hall complained of nausea and threw up. He told Hannah that his stomach burned and the coffee had a strange, sweet taste. Other members of the crew had consumed the same coffee without any ill effects. Hall had experienced stomach problems previously and he was the only one to get sick from the brew.

## UNEXPLAINED ILLNESS

Hall asked Bessels for an emetic to purge his system, but the doctor said that Hall was too weak from vomiting. By the next morning, the expedition leader's condition had worsened. Dr. Bessels gave him quinine injections to fight Hall's high fever, but within a few days Hall became delirious and accused some members of his crew of trying to poison him. He was particularly suspicious of Dr. Bessels, with whom he had had a difficult relationship since the expedition began. He claimed that he could see poisonous vapors coming from Bessels's mouth.

Worried that his food or medication might be poisoned, Hall refused to eat or take any treatment from Bessels. His health began to improve after a week. He spoke more rationally, but insisted that Hannah prepare his meals. On some occasions he also had seaman Joseph Mauch taste his food before he would agree to eat it. By the beginning of November, Hall's stomach pains had disappeared and he regained his appetite. Bessels convinced the ship's chaplain to prevail upon Hall to allow the doctor's treatments to resume.

On the evening of November 4, Hall let Bessels start giving him injections again. The chaplain watched the doctor heat little white crystals in a small glass bowl to dissolve them and inject them into Hall's leg. Two days later, the captain went out onto the deck of the *Polaris*. "I am as well as I ever was," he declared. But not for long.

Hall suddenly suffered a relapse. Just after midnight on November 8, 1871, Chester woke up Budington to announce that Hall was dying. Budington got dressed and entered Hall's cabin. The Arctic explorer was sitting on the edge of his bunk with his legs dangling over the side. He was glassy-eyed and his head kept shifting back and forth. He was "looking like a corpse," Budington later said. Through labored breaths Hall rasped: "How do you spell murder?" He looked around and his eyes rested on Bessels. "Doctor, I know everything that's going on;

you can't fool me," he said. Then he asked for some water but threw it up. Chester and Morton persuaded Hall to lie down. They stayed by his side as he lay face down on his bunk, his breathing becoming increasingly labored. Hall died on November 8, 1871, at 2:23 AM.

Morton and Chester dressed Hall in a fresh navy uniform. The ship's carpenter built a pine coffin. Morton, Chester, Tyson, and seaman Noah Hayes began digging a grave in the frozen ground on the shores of Greenland. It was difficult work. After two days, the hole was barely two feet deep, but it would have to do. A bell rang aboard the ship to mark the captain's final departure from the vessel on November 10. The coffin was placed on a sled. Tyson led the somber procession to the graveside, holding a lantern to help guide the way in the November darkness. The only sounds in the Arctic silence were the sled's runners scraping the snow and the crunching of the men's boots.

The chaplain performed a simple service. Hall's men placed loose gravel and stones over the coffin, unable to bury it completely. Ship engineer Emil Schumann prepared a wooden headboard with the penciled inscription: "C. F. Hall, Late Commander of the North Polar Expedition, died November 8, 1871. Aged 50 years." The board splintered and fell facedown when Hayes tried to drive it into the ground. The American flag that Hall had brought on the expedition to plant at the North Pole was hung at half-mast over his grave, and then the procession slowly made its way back to the ship. Hannah brought up the rear of the group, weeping softly for the death of her friend.

## SHIP WITHOUT A COMMANDER

Discipline aboard the *Polaris* fell apart completely after Hall's death. Budington drank more frequently and had no interest in traveling farther north in the spring. He just wanted to return home. In June 1872, Tyson and Chester tried to venture farther north to complete Hall's mission, but one whaleboat was crushed in the ice and another one had to be abandoned.

By mid-August, ice broke up sufficiently for the *Polaris* to begin heading for home, but Budington had been drinking heavily when he ran the ship into the pack ice soon afterward. The *Polaris* drifted for two months. In mid-October the ship broke free of ice and a huge iceberg threatened its safety. The vessel was being heaved and violently dropped. In a state of panic, Budington ordered that everything be thrown overboard, including two whaleboats. Much of the supplies

that had been gathered for an emergency slid away and disappeared beneath the ship.

Tyson and some of the other crew left the ship that day on October 15, 1872, and went out onto the ice to save what supplies they could. When pressure on the boat finally let up late that night, Tyson realized that the ice was cracking beneath his feet. He told Budington to let everyone back on board quickly, but Budington told him to move the two whale-boats farther from the ship. At that very moment, the floe to which the ship was tied came apart.

## CAST ADRIFT

Within minutes, the *Polaris* drifted away, leaving 19 men, women, and children alone on the ice. The group included Tyson, Meyer, Joe, Hannah, Punny, and Hans Hendrik and his family. For the next five months they floated on an ice floe that was a mile wide and at least five miles in circumference. Joe and Hans hunted seals and polar bears to keep the group alive.

At 5 AM on April 30, 1873, the group spotted a steamer barely 500 yards away from the perilous ice floe on which they were perched. The crew of the *Tigress*, a Newfoundland sealer, lowered boats onto the floe and rescued them. The group had drifted for 2,000 miles, from Smith Sound to Labrador without losing any lives. The American government sent the USS *Frolic* to St. John's, Newfoundland, to pick them up. Tyson and the other survivors arrived at the Washington Navy Yard at 1:15 PM on June 5. Tyson appeared before a hastily called inquiry at 4 PM the same day. The inquiry included U.S. Navy Secretary George Robeson, Admiral Goldsborough, and Commodore Reynolds representing the navy, Captain Henry Howgate of the Signal Corps, and Professor Spencer F. Baird representing the National Academy of Sciences and the Smithsonian. The three branches of government had been a part of the plans to send the *Polaris* to the North Pole.

## GOVERNMENT INQUIRY

Tyson, 44, told the inquiry about Budington's drinking and blamed him for the ship not traveling farther north. He also spoke of Hall's suspicious death and Hall's belief that he had been poisoned. Tyson pointed a finger at Budington or Bessels, but Hall's journals and records had disappeared. Other members of the crew were also interviewed, but

after six days of testimony the board of inquiry was no closer to finding out the truth about what really happened aboard the *Polaris*. The expedition had failed to reach the North Pole, Hall had died under mysterious circumstances, half of the crew was abandoned on an ice floe, the other half was missing, and the fate of the ship itself was still unknown. The USS *Uniata* left for Greenland on June 24. At Disco, Danish district inspector Karrup Smith handed over the manuscript that Hall had given him for safekeeping. It detailed his search for Sir John Franklin.

Meanwhile, the rest of the crew that had stayed aboard the *Polaris* was forced to abandon the ship off the coast of Greenland the day after being separated from their crewmates. They spent the winter ashore and then traveled south in their whaleboats until the Scottish whaler *Ravenscraig* spotted Budington's two boats on an ice floe and picked them up on June 3. By October 22, 1873, nearly two years after Hall's death, the last of the *Polaris* survivors arrived in Dundee, Scotland. They were returned to the United States.

A search party that located the remains of the *Polaris* camp on the coast of Greenland found several journals and logbooks, but pages for the dates covering the time of Hall's illness and death as well as the abandonment of the party on the ice floe had been torn out. Hall's own journal and other papers were missing.

During a second inquiry, Budington admitted that he had not wanted to take the ship farther north, and that he failed to properly check the ship's condition before abandoning it in October 1872. Another crewmember described how some of the men reacted to Hall's death. "There's a stone off my heart," Budington is alleged to have said. Bessels, it was claimed, had said that Hall's death was the best thing that could have happened aboard the *Polaris*—and then laughed.

For his part, Bessels testified about Hall's symptoms and the treatments the physician delivered. He said that Hall had suffered from a stroke, and in response he applied mustard plasters and cold compresses to the man's body and gave him purgatives of castor oil and three to four drops of croton oil. He also injected quinine under Hall's skin. Only Meyer and Bessels said that Hall was paralyzed on one side. Others in the crew testified that he wasn't. The surgeons general who were brought in to assess the testimony that Bessels provided agreed with the physician's assessment and treatment. They concluded that Hall had died of a stroke, a diagnosis that fit with some of the symptoms he had exhibited, including brief paralysis, slurred speech, erratic

pulse, and temporary coma. It was not completely consistent with the high fever that Bessels had managed to control with quinine injections.

## WHAT REALLY KILLED HALL?

Less than 100 years later, Dartmouth College English professor and Arctic scholar Charles (Chauncey) C. Loomis became intrigued with Hall's death. While researching Hall's biography, he became troubled by the board of inquiry's conclusion that Hall had died of a stroke. In his book *Weird and Tragic Shores* he explains, "My conclusion was, not that Hall certainly had been murdered, not even that he probably had been murdered, but only that murder was at least possible and plausible." The board of inquiry's hastily reached conclusion about Hall's cause of death was plausible, but the group had ignored other evidence that witnesses provided. Loomis wanted to have an autopsy performed to find out just what killed Charles Francis Hall.

Loomis made a request to the Danish Ministry for Greenland to allow Hall's body to be exhumed. He argued that an autopsy would have been ordered for a suspicious death had Hall died in modern times. The Danes referred Loomis to Count Eigel Knuth, an archaeologist and Arctic explorer who advised the department about proposed projects in its northern region. Knuth considered the idea repugnant. Loomis flew to Copenhagen, met with him, and promised to return the grave to the same condition in which he found it. Knuth relented.

In August 1968, a single-engine Otter floatplane flew over the ice-free waters of Hall Basin and dropped off Loomis, ex-marine Tom Gignoux, William Barrett, and pathologist Dr. Franklin Paddock. Gignoux dug up the grave, which was in the permafrost. The American flag covered Hall's face and the upper half of his body. The corpse was well preserved because of the cold and dry Arctic air, but it was frozen into the icy ground and couldn't be exhumed completely. Paddock bent over the grave to perform a brief autopsy. He discovered that Hall's intestines and stomach had dissolved over time. There was also no brain to study for signs of the stroke Bessels had claimed. Paddock collected hair and fingernail samples and sent them to the Centre for Forensic Medicine in Toronto, Canada.

The center reported that Hall had received a lethal quantity of arsenic in the last two weeks of his life. He had not died of a stroke at all—he had been poisoned. His symptoms were typical of arsenic poisoning: arsenic can have a sweet taste and can cause burning stomach pains,



vomiting, dehydration, intense thirst, feeble pulse, vertigo, stupor, and even mania.

Although several men aboard the Hall expedition had motives to want Hall dead, only Bessels had constant access to him. Therefore, it was possible for him to administer arsenic mixed in with the quinine injections or deliver it orally. Hall did improve during the time in which he refused to allow Bessels to treat him, but Hall had his own medicine chest. Did he accidentally poison himself in his delirium or did one of his crew deliberately kill him? Modern forensic techniques had solved a century-old mystery of what really killed Hall, but by then everyone involved with the expedition was long dead. Whether the poisoning was deliberate or accidental is a truth that may never be unearthed.

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Lizzie Borden was acquitted of murdering her father and stepmother. Chaiba Media.

## **Bloody Murder: The Death of Abby and Andrew Borden (1892)**

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*Lizzie Borden took an axe  
And gave her mother forty whacks.  
And when she saw what she had done,  
She gave her father forty-one.*

—Schoolyard rhyme

*The trial of Lizzie Borden for the murder of her father and stepmother was widely covered by newspapers of the day. The case's notoriety sparked a schoolyard rhyme, countless books and plays. Although Borden was acquitted, she never escaped the stigma of the accusations against her.*

Abby and Andrew Borden sat down for breakfast on the hot morning of August 4, 1892, with their guest John Vinnicum Morse. Andrew, 70, was one of the wealthiest men in Fall River, Massachusetts. He had been involved in the furniture business for 33 years and had accumulated a lot of real estate, including two farms in Swansea. His assets were worth an estimated \$350,000. He was also president of the Union Savings Bank and sat on the board of directors of several other companies.

Despite his wealth, Andrew was known as a miser. He lived in a plain, unpretentious, one-and-a-half story house at 92 Second Street with his second wife, Abby, 64, and two unmarried daughters from his first marriage, Emma, 41, and Lizzie, 32. His first wife, Sarah, had died when Lizzie was two years old. Morse, 59, was Lizzie and Emma's maternal uncle. He had arrived for a visit the day before from New Bedford and stayed overnight. It was the same day that Andrew and Lizzie had been violently ill. The trio wondered if there was poison in the bread they ate or the milk they drank. Lizzie had stayed in her room all morning prior to Morse's arrival. A day later, the family was feeling well again.

After Abby, Andrew, and Morse had finished breakfast that August morning, housemaid Bridget Sullivan, 25, washed the breakfast dishes while Abby dusted. Morse and Andrew Borden went to the sitting room to relax. They read the newspapers and chatted until about 8:45 AM. Then Morse prepared to leave so that he could run errands. As Andrew let Morse out the back door, he reminded him to return for lunch. Morse went to the post office to mail a postcard before going to visit Daniel Emery to see his niece and nephew.

Andrew left the house soon afterwards for business appointments at the Union Savings Bank, of which he was president, the National Union Bank, and the First National Bank. He then went to see Johnathon Clegg,

a furniture dealer who wanted to lease a store from him. Meanwhile, inside the Borden household Lizzie came downstairs and decided to have coffee and cookies for breakfast. She sat down at the kitchen table and read old magazines from the closet as she ate. Abby told Sullivan to wash the windows on the ground floor. Then she went upstairs to the guest room to make the bed. The housemaid began washing the outside of the three parlor windows at the front of the house. There were also two in the dining room and two in the sitting room. One door was unlocked, but she didn't see anyone enter or leave the house as she performed her task. She also did not hear Lizzie or Abby moving about inside the house.

Sullivan was washing windows from the inside of the house when she heard a key turn in the front door at about 10:40 AM. She opened the door and let Andrew inside. He had returned home with a parcel in his hand. He took off his coat and sat in a chair in the dining room. Lizzie came downstairs about five minutes later and asked her father if he had any mail. She told him that Abby had received a note and had gone out to visit a friend.

Andrew then took the key to his bedroom from the mantel and walked up the back stairs to get a sweater. He came back down soon after and sat down in a rocking chair in the sitting room. Then he stretched out on the couch. As Sullivan washed the dining room windows, Lizzie took a small ironing board from the kitchen, laid it on the dining room table, and began to iron her handkerchiefs.

## FINDING THE BODIES

After Sullivan had finished washing the windows, she went upstairs to her bedroom in the attic just before 11 AM. She heard the city hall clock strike 11 as she lay on her bed for a short nap. Ten minutes later, Lizzie yelled, "Bridget, come down quick! Father's dead! Somebody's come in and killed him!" Sullivan rushed downstairs to the sitting room on the first floor. When she entered the room she saw Andrew Borden lying sprawled on the couch. He had been struck seven times and had deep axe wounds on his face and head.

Lizzie told Sullivan to run out and fetch family physician Dr. Seabury Bowen at his home. The housemaid crossed Second Street, but the doctor was not at his house. She told Mrs. Bowen about the murder and returned home. Lizzie then sent her out again to summon Alice Russell, a family friend who lived several blocks away. Just at that time,

neighbor Adelaide Churchill returned home from grocery shopping. She looked out of her kitchen window and saw Lizzie leaning against her own door looking agitated. Lizzie announced that someone had killed Mr. Borden. She asked Mrs. Churchill to come over. While Churchill was crossing the street, she spotted news dealer John Cunningham in front of a house four doors down from the Bordens. She told him that she wanted a policeman. He phoned the city marshal and told him that there had been a stabbing or a fight at the Borden residence.

Dr. Bowen stepped from his carriage moments later. Churchill and Russell were in the kitchen consoling Lizzie. Sullivan arrived home and asked where Abby was. Lizzie told her to go upstairs to check because she was almost certain that she had heard her stepmother return home. A nervous Sullivan refused to go by herself. Churchill accompanied her up the stairs.

When Sullivan had nearly reached the upper floor, she peered into the guest room. The bedroom door was wide open and Abby Borden's body was lying on the floor. Sullivan ran into the room and stood at the foot of the bed. Abby was lying facedown between the bed and the dresser, her arms folded across her chest and pinned beneath her body. It was 11:30 AM, and the last time Sullivan had seen her was at 9 AM. Churchill and the housemaid walked back downstairs and a sickened Sullivan ran outside to the yard to vomit.

Dr. Bowen, who had made his way to the family's home, examined the bodies of Andrew and Abby. Blood was still dripping from Andrew's wounds, but Abby was lying in a pool of thick, dark, and dry congealed blood. The Brussels carpet's canvas backing kept the blood at the top of the carpet when it dried instead of letting it seep through to the bottom. Abby had been attacked from behind and sustained more than a dozen cuts in the head and neck. Neither of the Bordens showed signs of having struggled against their attacker; it appeared that both had died instantly. Lizzie asked Bowen to telegram Emma, who was staying with friends 15 miles away in Fairhaven, to tell her that her father was very ill. "Tell it to her as gently as you can," Lizzie asked.

## **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

Fall River's police station was 400 yards from the Borden home. Policemen began arriving at the house shortly after both bodies were discovered. The first officer to arrive on the scene 10 minutes earlier had raced back to the station to tell City Marshal Rufus Hilliard that

there had been a murder. Deputy Sheriff Francis H. Wixon was in the marshal's office when he heard the news.

Investigators asked Lizzie where she was when the slayings occurred. She explained that she woke up late, went downstairs, and spoke to her father when he returned home. She assumed that her stepmother had gone out to see a friend. Then she went to the barn behind the house for 20 minutes to find a lead sinker for fishing. She returned after hearing a cry coming from the house. She entered the sitting room and saw her father on the sofa, bloody and lifeless. Robbery was not the motive for the attack since Andrew's watch and money remained. Police believed that someone who stood to benefit from their deaths had killed the couple. When Lizzie was questioned after the murders, she said that her father had quarreled with a man called Clegg about renting a shop for activities of which the prohibitionist Andrew did not approve.

Photos were taken of the bodies and the Borden property. Fall River medical examiner Dr. William Dolan arrived and laid the bodies of the victims on the dining room table. He examined their heads and removed the stomachs for further investigation. They were sent to Professor E. S. Wood of Harvard Medical School for analysis, along with milk that the family had consumed just before becoming ill the day before.

Dolan knew that the Bordens had died of their head injuries, but he wanted to rule out the possibility that someone had attempted to poison them before the fatal blows were administered. He also wanted to determine the time of death, based on the degree to which the food they ate at breakfast had been digested. The information would tell him who was killed first and the amount of time that had elapsed between the two killings.

The police continued questioning Lizzie. They asked her if there were any axes in the house. She had Sullivan take the officers down to the cellar. They found four axes in a box near the furnace. One hatchet had the handle broken off and the blade was covered with ash. Police thought the handle had been snapped off and the remaining head was the murder weapon.

Sullivan also took the police through the house as they searched it, locking doors as she went. The previous summer someone had entered the house in broad daylight, stole a watch and other valuables, and escaped without being seen. Emma, Lizzie, and Sullivan were home at the time. The barn was broken into less than a year later. Every door to the house was kept locked after the first break-in.

Police saw no signs of an intruder, and they were puzzled by the absence of blood around the bodies. While looking around the property, they noticed that workmen were calmly working on the other side of the fences around the Borden home. One man was standing in one direction sawing wood and two other men in work clothes were facing another direction. They clearly had not seen or heard anything; they were not even aware that a double murder had been committed and that two bodies had just been discovered.

About 20 minutes after the bodies were found, John Morse returned to the Borden home for lunch, unaware of the events that had unfolded in his absence. He walked to the backyard to pick some pears and ate part of one. Sullivan was standing at the back door when he entered the house. She told him that Mr. and Mrs. Borden had been murdered. Morse opened the sitting room door and saw doctors and the police inside. He walked in and glanced at Andrew's body, and then he went upstairs to see Abby's in the very guestroom in which he had slept the night before.

## WORD OF THE DOUBLE MURDER SPREADS

By this time, news of the double murder had started to spread. Curiosity seekers began arriving at Second Street and congregating outside the Borden house. They were soon joined by reporters from morning newspapers from Boston and the *New York Times*. Telegraph operators were kept busy transmitting stories. A police officer was stationed at the residence's front door, another at the back door, and a third was dispatched to keep the crowd at bay and the street clear in front of the house.

The bodies of the two victims were still lying on the dining room table at 7 PM when Emma returned from visiting overnight in Fairhaven. Sullivan went to sleep at a neighbor's home, and Russell stayed in the house with Lizzie, Emma, and John Morse. Sullivan returned to the house the next morning, but she packed up her things two days after the murder and never returned.

The day after the double slaying, the Borden family offered a \$5,000 reward to anyone who helped find the murderer(s) and secure a conviction. In the meantime, police searched for but did not find a note from a sick friend asking Abby to visit. Lizzie said that Mrs. Borden tore it up after reading it and burned it. Bits of charred paper were found in the stove, but police couldn't determine if it was that note. Nobody knew

who had sent the message, and no one stepped forward despite the ensuing publicity.

Then came what police believed was a break in the case. At D. R. Smith's Drug Store, clerk Eli Bence said that Lizzie had been in the store within 36 hours before the double slaying and had asked to purchase prussic acid, but he refused to sell it to her without a prescription. He didn't know her by name, but he positively identified her when police officers brought him to the Borden house and he saw her there. Lizzie denied that she had been to the drugstore, but investigators were suspicious.

The bodies of Abby and Andrew Borden remained in the family dining room until they were buried on August 6, 1892, in a private ceremony at Oak Grove Cemetery. They were laid to rest in two plain black caskets. An ivy wreath was placed beside Andrew's body, and a bouquet of white roses and fern leaves tied with a white satin ribbon was placed next to Abby. About 75 people attended the service in the house, which consisted of readings from the Scriptures and prayers. About 3,000 to 4,000 people gathered in front of the house at about 11 AM for the funeral, and 20 police officers kept order.

On Sunday, August 7, Alice Russell watched as her friend Lizzie burned a dress in the kitchen stove. "I am going to burn the old thing up. It's all covered with paint," she explained. Police officers were outside continuing their investigation and keeping an eye on the crowd in the street. "I wouldn't let anyone see you doing that if I were you," Russell replied.

## **ARREST OF LIZZIE BORDEN**

Lizzie was arrested four days later, after an inquest before Judge Josiah Blaisdell wrapped up in the courtroom above the central police station. Just after 7 PM on August 11, 1892, her lawyer Andrew Jennings was brought to the matron's room, where Lizzie was lying on the sofa after spending the afternoon at the inquest. She was charged with murder. People thronged to the police station hoping to catch a glimpse of her.

In the suffocating heat the next day, Lizzie was arraigned in Second District Court before Judge J. C. Blaisdell and a room filled to capacity with the curious. In a weak voice, she stood up and pleaded not guilty. She had to repeat the words louder because Clerk of the Court Augustus B. Leonard didn't hear her the first time. She was not granted bail. She left the courtroom leaning heavily on Reverend E. A. Buck, the city missionary. At 3 PM she was brought from the central police station to



the train, and then she was sent to Bristol County Jail in Taunton that afternoon by City Marshal Rufus H. Hilliard. More crowds gathered to watch.

Police had to control the throngs as Lizzie was taken to the train station with eight reporters in pursuit in two carriages. Many people followed, walking behind the carriages. Others gathered at the train depot. Once the convoy had reached the train station, Marshal Hilliard stepped from the carriage, but the others remained inside until the train arrived. Several policemen were needed to keep the crowd away from the carriage in which Lizzie was waiting to board the train. The throng surged forward when the ticket master called out the train's arrival.

### PRELIMINARY HEARING

Lizzie was held behind bars until her preliminary hearing began on August 22, 1892. She did not testify, but family lawyer Andrew Jennings entered her testimony from the inquest into evidence. Harvard Medical School chemist Professor Wood analyzed the stomach contents of the two victims. He testified that based on the degree of digestion, Abby Borden died at about 9:30 AM—more than an hour before her husband was stabbed to death between 10:55 and 11:10 AM. Wood checked the stomach contents for signs of prussic acid but found none.

Wood also studied the hatchets and axes found in the family's cellar. He concluded that none were the murder weapon. He examined Lizzie's clothes. The white skirt had one spot, which looked like blood, that was directly in the front about six inches from the bottom. However, there was no blood on her shoes or stockings. Wood testified that given the nature of the attack on Andrew and Abby Borden, it wasn't possible for the assailant to escape without getting any blood on himself or herself.

At the hearing it was revealed that there was tension in the Borden household. Mrs. Borden and her stepdaughters were not on good terms. Five years earlier, Andrew had purchased his mother-in-law's half of a house on Fourth Street and gave it to his wife. A few months later he gave his daughters Emma and Lizzie a property on Ferry Street for \$1. He purchased the property back from them less than three weeks before his death for \$5,000.

When the preliminary hearing ended on September 1, 1892, Justice Blaisdell, an old friend of Andrew Borden's, wiped away a tear as he said that he believed Lizzie might be guilty of the double murders. She was at

odds with her stepmother and had had an opportunity to commit the slaying. Her attempt to buy poison showed premeditation, he said. He announced that Lizzie would be held over for the grand jury.

The grand jury met in November 1892, to consider two indictments. After deliberating for six days, they adjourned on November 21 without reaching a verdict. By then Alice Russell became convinced that Lizzie was guilty of killing her father and stepmother. District Attorney Hosea Knowlton recalled the jury, and Russell testified about seeing her friend burn a dress on Sunday, August 7, three days after the murders. Lizzie was indicted for both murders on December 2.

### TRIAL OF LIZZIE BORDEN

Although 10 months elapsed between the murders and the start of Lizzie Borden's trial in New Bedford on June 5, 1893, interest in the case had not abated. At least 50 reporters from New Bedford, Fall River, Providence, Boston, and New York covered the trial. Photos were virtually unknown in newspapers of the day, and line drawings accompanied only major stories. Reporters, sketch artists, and photographers from around the country booked every hotel room in New Bedford in advance. Sketch artists rather than photographers captured scenes inside and outside the courtroom.

A headquarters location for the press was set up in an old carriage shed behind the courtroom, and it was equipped with telegraph equipment and typewriters. Private wires were set up directly from the shed to the newsrooms of newspapers in New York, Boston, and Providence and the headquarters of the Associated Press. The Associated Press was the only wire service in existence at that time. Inside the courtroom 50 extra chairs were brought in for journalists to watch the story unfold in Victorian-era New England. Another dozen reporters stood along the walls of the courtroom, making notes as best they could. Each writer had a pass assuring them of a spot, but it had to be shown at all times.

Crowds gathered early outside the courthouse each day of the trial, and many people stayed there all day hoping to catch a glimpse of Lizzie Borden. Hundreds tried to get a seat in the courtroom the first day. As the trial continued, the crowd swelled and lawyers struggled to make their way to the door of the courtroom.

The trial began at 11:28 AM on June 5, 1893, before Chief Justice Albert Mason of the Superior Court, Judge Dewey, and Judge Blodgett.

The High Sheriff of Bristol County, Andrew Wright, served as bailiff and called the court to order. Prosecutors Hosea Knowlton and William Moody faced off against defense lawyers Andrew J. Jennings, Colonel Melvin O. Adams of Boston, and ex-Governor George D. Robinson. The room was oppressively hot as 145 prospective jurors filled it. By the end of the day, 12 men (no women were selected for juries in 1893) were chosen to hear the case.

The following day members of the public filled up the seats in the courtroom, while others stood outside the brick building. It was stiflingly hot. The prosecution began presenting its case. In his opening statement, Moody claimed that Lizzie had planned the murder in advance, and her contradictory statements given at the inquest proved that she was guilty. The prosecution believed that she was the only one with the opportunity and the motive to commit the murders. There was bad blood between Abby and her stepdaughters because they thought the property should be divided more evenly.

Lizzie fainted for several minutes when Moody casually opened an ordinary-looking bag and removed the skulls of the two victims. She dropped her head and slid sideways in her chair, slumped over. Smelling salts revived her. She was given water, and the trial resumed. Alice Russell testified that Lizzie told her the night before the murder that she felt as though something terrible was about to happen and that she had seen a strange man loitering outside the house. Russell also testified about seeing Lizzie burn a dress on August 7. Housemaid Bridget Sullivan, who had worked for the family for nearly three years, said that there was no bad blood between Lizzie and Abby. Emma, the sister of the accused, testified that Lizzie had no reason to kill her father or stepmother.

At the trial, the police admitted that they didn't carefully search the rooms, including Lizzie's, to see what dresses she had or if any showed signs of blood from the murder. Assistant Marshal John Fleet said that they searched the closet, attic, and rooms but did not open a trunk. "We just looked in, but did not disturb anything," he said. "We looked into everything we could look into, but not very closely. We were not there long."

Lizzie's lawyers argued in favor of not admitting the testimony she had given at the inquest because they said it had not been given voluntarily. Although she had not been placed under arrest at the time, she was under police surveillance within days of the murders. She was,

for all intents, accused of the crime. After both sides presented their arguments, the three judges retired. They returned just over an hour later and ruled that Lizzie had been a prisoner at the time of the inquest, and therefore, her testimony would not be admitted at the trial. Lizzie burst into tears, sobbing and shaking while hiding her face in her handkerchief.

The defense argued that Lizzie would only have had 8 to 13 minutes to change her dress or put another one on over it, broken the handle of the hatchet that was used in the murders, rubbed the blade with ash to conceal the blood, and clean herself up. The prosecution had no murder weapon and they lacked any forensic evidence tying Lizzie Borden to the murders. Their case was entirely circumstantial.

Closing arguments were delivered two weeks after the trial began. Following about an hour and a half of deliberations, the foreman of the jury announced that they found Lizzie not guilty. The courtroom exploded with loud cheers. She buried her head in her sister's arms and said, "Now take me home. I want to go to the old place and go at once tonight." An hour later she was taken by carriage to the train station and returned to Fall River.

The double murder remains officially unsolved, but Lizzie Borden would never escape the stigma of the murder charges against her. Five weeks after the verdict, the two sisters bought a large home that they called Maplecroft in Fall River's most fashionable "The Hill" neighborhood. In 1897 Lizbeth, as she insisted on being called after the trial, was charged with stealing two paintings from a shop. The items were worth less than \$100 and the matter was settled out of court.

Lizzie died on June 1, 1927, after a long illness. She was a recluse, shunned by society and never having shaken the suspicion that surrounded her until she passed away. Forty friends attended as she was buried in Oak Grove Cemetery in Fall River beside her mother, Sarah, and Andrew and Abby. She left \$30,000 to the Animal Rescue League of Fall River and \$500 to the city of Fall River to care perpetually for her father's burial lot. Emma died on June 10 after falling down the back stairs of her house in Newmarket, New Hampshire.

In the aftermath of her death, more than a dozen authors wrote books speculating about whether Lizzie Borden committed the murders and, if so, why. The story also sparked plays, an opera, and a ballet. The debate about Borden's guilt continues, but the facts are just as uncertain now as they were then. The case is no closer to being solved.

**FURTHER READING**

[http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/notorious\\_murders/famous/borden/index\\_1.html](http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/notorious_murders/famous/borden/index_1.html).

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# **Help Wanted: The Murder of Nora Fuller (1902)**

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*Nora Fuller was murdered at a time when the use of fingerprinting was only beginning to emerge. Her killer, who may have left his prints at the scene of the crime, was a man of many aliases. If he had left his prints behind, the police would have nonetheless been unable to use them to identify him since it would be a few more years before police departments began using fingerprinting in murder investigations.*

An elegantly dressed, middle-aged man was looking for a house to rent on that wintery day of January 8, 1902. He wandered around San Francisco's Sutter Street, scouting for empty homes. Then he walked into the real estate office of Umbesen & Co. to inquire about the house at 2211 Sutter Street. It was indeed vacant, the clerk told him, and discreetly asked for references. The man said that his name was C. B. Hawkins. He admitted that he had no references because he and his wife had been living at the Golden West Hotel.

Hawkins said that he was willing to pay for the first month's rent in advance to ease any concerns about payment. The real estate clerk thought his client looked like a businessman and agreed to rent him the house. The transaction completed, he handed him a receipt for the rent and the keys to the house. He didn't contact the Golden West Hotel to check whether Hawkins was, in fact, registered there as a guest. Had he done so, he would have discovered that there was no one by the name of Hawkins staying at the hotel.

Now that Hawkins had a place to live, he clearly needed some furnishings. The next day he went into J. C. Cavanaugh's, a furniture store at 848 Mission Street. He told the salesman that he just needed a few items to furnish a room temporarily. He picked out two pillows, a pair of blankets, a comforter, and a second-hand mattress. He wanted to be sure that Cavanaugh's would bring that particular mattress, so he lifted up the corner of the mattress and scribbled his initials on the underside.

It was late in the day, but Hawkins demanded that the mattress and bedding be delivered to his house that night. No delivery, no sale, he said. The salesman explained that the delivery boy would have to work late to accommodate the request, but Hawkins insisted. Shortly afterwards, the delivery boy dragged the bedding up the steps of the darkened house at 2211 Sutter Street and rang the bell. A man wearing a top hat appeared in the doorway and told him to leave the mattress and other items inside the hallway. The boy complied.

Hawkins had still more shopping to do. On January 10 he went to the Standard Furniture Company at 745 Mission Street and bought a second-hand bed and an old chair from salesman Richard Fitzgerald. This time he let the deliveryman carry the heavy pieces up to the second floor and insisted that he assemble the bed.

## JOB OPPORTUNITY

That same day, an advertisement appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “Young girl to take care of baby; good home and good wages; Box 120 Chronicle,” it said. Fifteen-year-old Nora Fuller, who was looking for work, spotted the ad. She was born in China in 1886, the daughter of English parents. Her mother, who brought her to San Francisco after her father died, was remarried to a man named W. W. Fuller but later divorced him. Nora and her younger brother Louis lived with their mother at 1747 Fulton Street. Money was tight, and Nora discussed the job opportunity with her mother. Mrs. Fuller agreed to let her daughter respond to the ad immediately. Nora sent a note to the mailbox listed in the ad, expressing her interest in the position.

A postcard arrived the next day: “Miss Fuller in answer to yours in response to my advt, kindly call at the Popular Restaurant, 55 Geary St, and inquire for Mr. John Bennett, at 1 o’clock. If you can’t come at 1, come at 6. J. B.” The message arrived too late that Saturday for Nora Fuller to arrive at the restaurant at 1 PM, but she knew she could still make it for 6 PM. She got dressed quickly and ate an apple. Her mother gave her money to buy groceries on her way home after the interview. Nora put the postcard with the instructions in her pocket and left the house at 5 PM.

At about the same time, a customer arrived at the Popular Restaurant and sat down at a table. He had been coming to the restaurant on and off for about 15 years and was known among the staff as “Tenderloin” because he always ordered a porterhouse steak and only ate the tenderloin portion. Half an hour after he had been seated, the customer began getting impatient. He stood up and walked over to the counter. He told restaurant owner Mr. F. W. Krone that he was expecting a young girl and to please send her to his table when she arrived. He waited impatiently for another half hour before abandoning his seat. He stepped outside and paced up and down the sidewalk. Then he was gone. Nobody ever knew whether or not Fuller had arrived for her appointment.

Shortly afterwards, the telephone rang at the Fuller house. Nora’s brother Louis answered. A voice on the other end said that it was Nora



and that she was at Mr. Bennett's house at 1500 Geary Street. He wanted her to start work immediately. As he held the receiver, Louis relayed the message to his mother in the kitchen. She replied that Louis was to tell his sister to come home and wait until Monday to begin her new job. She added that he was to remind her to stop by the grocery store and pick up some items. Louis followed his mother's instructions. The voice on the other end of the phone answered, "All right. Tell Mamma I'll bring them." It was the last that anyone heard from a person believed to be Nora. Unbeknownst to her family, the address that Louis was given for the Bennett residence, 1500 Geary, was a vacant lot.

## DISAPPEARANCE

Five days later, on January 16, 1902, Mrs. Fuller finally contacted police and told them that her daughter had been missing since Saturday. Nora had not been seen or heard from since she went to a job interview in response to a newspaper advertisement. Mrs. Fuller was worried that her daughter had been kidnapped. Police were not convinced. Given that one of her friends had run away recently, they believed that Nora had followed suit. They changed their mind about that theory three weeks later.

It was Mr. H. E. Dean's job to inspect rental properties belonging to Umben & Co. whenever they became vacant. The latest tenant at 2211 Sutter Street, a Mr. Hawkins, had rented the flat for only a month before leaving again. The vacant two-story white house needed to be cleaned and prepared so that it could be rented to another tenant.

On February 8, 1902, Dean walked up the littered steps and unlocked the door. As he wandered from room to room on the first floor, he noticed that the doors to all the rooms had been left open. There was no furniture, and the place was deserted except for an empty whiskey bottle on the mantel. Dean climbed the stairs to the second floor. As he inspected the property, he nearly missed a tiny room at the back. It was the only one whose door was closed.

Dean opened the door to the darkened room. The shades were drawn, concealing the afternoon sun, but there was just enough light seeping through for him to see the form of a naked woman lying on the bed with nothing covering her. Sensing something wrong, he rushed outside and found a policeman standing on the corner.

The police officer accompanied Dean back to the house and entered the tiny room at the back. When he lifted up the window shades, they

both saw that a young girl was lying on the bed. Her long dark hair was spread over the pillow. On the only chair beside the bed were piled outer garments, a pair of laced shoes, a pink cotton undershirt, dark stockings, and a torn white chemise. Embarrassed by the immodesty of the scene, the policeman grabbed some clothing from the chair and covered up the body. Then he went to alert police headquarters.

## **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

Nora Fuller had been murdered. Her purse, which was left behind on the chair, had a key to the front door of the Fuller home on Fulton Street. Strangely, the postcard with the details of her meeting with Mr. Bennett was missing. It was her mother who told police about the note. Nora's body was taken to the morgue that night for an autopsy while the police began their investigation and tried to track down her killer.

Detectives contacted people and visited businesses from the Tenderloin to Mission Street. At the Popular Restaurant, the owner's son told police that the man who was waiting to meet a young girl on January 11 was about 40 years old, five feet eight inches tall, and weighed about 160 pounds. He had a brown mustache, was well dressed, and appeared refined. Salesmen at both furniture stores gave the same description of a man who bought bedding and other furnishings for 2211 Sutter Street.

The police concluded that John Bennett and C. B. Hawkins were one and the same person. Now they had a description of their suspect, but that did not lead them any closer to Nora Fuller's killer. As investigators followed the trail, it led them back to the little house on Sutter Street. Detectives returned to the scene of the crime to look for clues. They pored over mail that C. B. Hawkins/John Bennett had received at the Golden West Hotel and on Sutter Street, but none indicated where he could be found.

A search of the house turned up a cigar butt in the room where Nora was discovered. A receipt from the furniture store for the bedding was found on a shelf in the back of the bedroom closet. Fingerprint identification in a criminal investigation was first used in Argentina in 1892 to identify a woman who murdered her two sons and left a bloody print on a doorpost, but it wasn't until a few years after the Fuller murder that police forces and prisons in the United States would begin to use this latest forensic technology.

As detectives continued their search of the house, they noted that the fireplaces showed no signs of having been used. There were no papers

or indications that someone had eaten in the house. Police checked with the San Francisco utilities company, but there was no record of them having received an application for water or gas for 2211 Sutter Street. Neighbors said that between January 11 and February 8, they did not see anyone enter or leave the house.

Four days after Nora Fuller's body was discovered, her mother went to the morgue and confirmed her identity by pointing to a vaccination mark on Nora's left leg. Then Mrs. Fuller was taken for a short tour of the house where her daughter had died. Coroner Dr. Bacigalupi released the results of the autopsy, which indicated that Nora had been strangled to death. Dr. Charles Morgan had examined the contents of her stomach and found traces of alcohol and signs that she was unaccustomed to drinking it. She died one or two hours after eating an apple, he added. This forensic information suggested that Nora Fuller was murdered the evening of January 11, just a few short hours after she left home for the final time.

An inquest was held into the circumstances surrounding the teenager's death. Her friend, 17-year-old Madge Graham, testified that Nora had often spoken about a friend named Bennett. Graham speculated that the job advertisement placed in the *San Francisco Chronicle* was merely a ruse to fool Mrs. Fuller. She said that Mrs. Fuller was strict and Nora sometimes had to leave the house to telephone "some man" away from her mother's prying eyes and ears. Graham claimed that Nora had once asked her friend to say that the two teenagers were going to the theater together. It was a cover to allow Nora to go out and see "some man." Nora had a reputation in her neighborhood as being a devoted daughter, and therefore few people placed much stock in the story of these clandestine telephone calls and meetings.

The police captain of detectives John Seymour headed up the investigation and went searching for more clues. A reward of \$5,000 was offered for information leading to the arrest of the crime's perpetrator, which led to a flood of people telephoning or sending in letters with potential leads. Interest in Nora's murder was high. The police wanted to return her personal effects to her family, but they had disappeared. People scavenging for "souvenirs" had taken the items.

Handwriting expert Theodore Kytka was hired to read through change-of-address cards at the post office. Police hoped that he would find some with handwriting that matched that of the elusive Mr. Hawkins on the lease that he had signed for the house. Kytka examined 32,000 cards and found three that had similar writing. A fourth one was from

someone requesting a change of address from San Francisco to Kansas City. It seemed like a long shot, but Captain Seymour didn't want to leave any stone unturned. He took the train to Missouri and interviewed the bewildered man. As it turned out, he had nothing to do with Nora Fuller's death.

While Seymour was in Kansas City, police found another lead. San Francisco newspapers had carried a story on January 18 about the disappearance of a clerk named Charles B. Hadley. The man had worked at the *San Francisco Examiner*, and his accounts at work had been found to be short. A detective learned that he had been living at a hotel on Ellis Street at the time with a young woman named Ollie Blasier.

When interviewed, Blasier said that Hadley had walked out on her and she had no idea where he went. The following day, newspapers published copies of the Hawkins signature as it appeared on the lease with Umbesen & Co. Blasier thought it looked similar to Hadley's signature on a photo he had given her. She went to police headquarters and handed them the photo and signature. Kytka compared it with the Hawkins signature and found that the two were identical.

There was just one problem. Hadley was clean-shaven whereas Hawkins was not. Blasier explained that Hadley had a collection of false mustaches that he sometimes wore. Kytka touched up the photo of Hadley, adding a mustache and a silk plug-hat. He then showed it to everyone who had seen Bennett or Hawkins. Most agreed that it resembled the man they had met, except for the restaurant owner.

Seymour was convinced that Bennett, Hawkins, and Hadley were all the same person. Then he received word from Minneapolis that Hadley was really Charles Start, who had been wanted for embezzlement since 1889. The detective printed out and distributed thousands of circulars with information about the suspect in Nora Fuller's murder, but no clues turned up. Neither did the man of many aliases. Nora Fuller's killer was never found.

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Dorothy Arnold vanished without a trace. Library of Congress.

# The Missing Socialite: The Mysterious Disappearance of Dorothy Arnold (1910)

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*The unsolved disappearance of socialite Dorothy Arnold was cloaked with secrecy as her family tried to keep it quiet for more than a month. Once the news became public, the number of alleged sightings multiplied. This highlights one of the difficulties of disappearances where no body is found, and every possible lead must be pursued to yet another dead end.*

New York City socialite Dorothy Harriet Camille Arnold needed to buy a gown for a party. The young woman from a well-known and well-connected local family was the niece of former United States Supreme Court Justice Rufus W. Peckham and the daughter of perfumery importer Francis C. Arnold, head of F. R. Arnold & Co. She lived with her parents, brothers John, 27, and Hinckley, who was several years younger, and her 18-year-old sister, Marjorie.

It was cold that day on December 12, 1910, and Arnold was dressed in a tailor-made blue suit, a long blue coat, small, black velvet hat with a hatpin of lapis lazuli, and matching earrings. She picked up her black fox muff and a black velvet handbag containing \$20 to \$30. She had a bank account of her own. On her way out of the house, Arnold told her mother that she was going shopping to buy an evening gown for a party. Her mother offered to come along to help her select the gown, but her daughter preferred to browse on her own. "When I find the gown I want, I will telephone you and you can come down and see it," she replied.

Dorothy Arnold left her home at 108 East Seventy-Ninth Street just before noon. She walked down Fifth Avenue and stopped in at the Park and Tilford store on Fifty-Ninth Street to buy candy and had it charged to her father's account. Then she bought a humorous book, *An Engaged Girl's Sketches*, at Bretano's bookstore at about 1:30 PM. Arnold had graduated from Bryn Mawr College in 1905, spoke several languages, and enjoyed writing. She was disappointed that two short stories she wrote for magazines had recently been rejected for publication.

It is believed that after leaving the bookstore, Arnold stopped in at a nearby travel agency to inquire about steamships to Europe. She asked about rates and sailing schedules and picked up information, but left without buying a ticket. She was expected to go to a Fifth Avenue department store to buy the gown, as that was the primary purpose for her shopping trip, but there is no confirmation that she ever arrived there. She did run into a girlfriend that afternoon and told her that she was going for a walk in Central Park, and that is where Dorothy Arnold's trail ended.

She never returned home. It is believed that she went missing sometime between noon and 2 PM on December 12, 1910.

It was not until that evening that anyone noticed Arnold's absence. Her family became concerned when she failed to return home for dinner, as she usually warned her family if she was to miss a meal. Their worry grew as the evening wore on without any news of her. The next morning there was still no sign of the socialite, and her family began telephoning her friends to find out if anyone had seen her since she left the house the day before.

## **POLICE NOTIFIED**

By the evening of December 13, the family decided that the situation had become increasingly serious. They contacted their lawyer for help and then notified police. Not wanting to draw undue attention to their situation, they requested that the police investigate while keeping Arnold's disappearance under wraps. It is not clear why. The Arnolds also hired the Pinkerton Detective Agency to help locate Dorothy. Detectives searched hospitals, retreats, and other places where she might have been brought had she been injured or ill. Detectives went to Boston, Washington D.C., and other cities where she had friends and former college classmates, but nobody had seen or heard from her.

Four days before her disappearance, Dorothy Arnold had withdrawn \$30 from her bank account, which was not unusual. She had an allowance of \$100 a month and usually took out \$25 a week. Sales clerks questioned in both shops she was known to have visited that day said that Arnold's demeanor seemed courteous and untroubled. Nothing appeared to be amiss.

While searching Dorothy's room for clues, her family found information and promotional materials from different steamship lines that travel to Europe. The companies were contacted to find out if she had sailed aboard one bound for Europe. Pinkerton's agents in Europe were instructed to meet every steamship that arrived from New York to see if she had made the transatlantic crossing. Although some women resembling Dorothy had disembarked, the information proved to be a false lead.

At first the police believed that Arnold had run away to get married. Pinkerton's detectives searched records of marriage licenses, but it proved fruitless; none turned up with her name. They spoke to all the men with whom she was acquainted, but they were all accounted for and she was not with any of them.



While searching through Arnold's possessions for clues, her family found a packet of letters from her friend George C. Griscom Jr., a man from a wealthy Pittsburgh family. He had known her for about four years and had seen her at the beginning of November before he sailed to Italy with his parents a month prior to her disappearance. The Arnolds wondered if the pair had eloped. They contacted Lloyd C. Griscom, a former ambassador to Italy who was one of his relatives, to find out how to reach Griscom Jr. He was in Florence, they were told. They immediately sent a telegram to him in Italy on December 16 to see what her friend knew about her disappearance. He replied that he knew nothing and could offer no clues. Police discounted the theory that Arnold had eloped.

The Arnolds were not convinced that Griscom knew as little about the situation as he claimed. Mrs. Arnold and her eldest son, John, decided to take a steamer to Italy to speak with Griscom Jr. personally. They went to his hotel on January 16, where John demanded that Griscom give him the letters Dorothy had written to him. He did so, but they were never passed on to police to determine if they revealed any clues as to what had happened to the socialite. Her brother claimed there was nothing of importance in the letters and that they had been destroyed. The Arnold family said that the relationship between Dorothy and Griscom was not serious, yet when Griscom returned home to the United States, he said that he was anxious to marry Dorothy once she was found. He believed that she would agree to marry him if her mother consented.

## MAKING THE CASE PUBLIC

Six weeks after Dorothy disappeared, New York City deputy police commissioner William J. Flynn told the Arnolds that the police had exhausted all of their usual investigation methods to find a missing person. Bringing the public's attention to the disappearance was the only way to generate any other possible leads through newspaper coverage. The family's friends and lawyers advised them to follow Flynn's recommendation, and they finally agreed.

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold announced that they would offer a reward of \$1,000 (a large amount at the time) to anyone who provided information that led to finding their daughter. Circulars were printed with a picture and detailed description of Dorothy Arnold and included information about the reward. These were distributed to police departments across

the United States, Canada, Mexico, and continental Europe. Dorothy was described as being 25 years old, five feet four inches tall, 140 pounds, with dark brown hair, and greyish-blue eyes.

After the disappearance was made public on January 26, 1911, the story received almost daily coverage in the *New York Times*. Articles also appeared in newspapers as far away as Europe. Then leads began pouring in. Arnold was reportedly seen in a number of cities, including St. Augustine, Florida; Atlantic City, New Jersey; Richmond, Virginia; and Muskogee, Oklahoma. For example, a man said that he had seen a young woman who resembled Dorothy on a ferry heading to Pennsylvania.

An investigation of each lead inevitably led to the conclusion that the person thought to be Arnold was not. Ultimately, none of the clues proved to be useful. The family also received two ransom notes requesting payments of at least \$5,000 for Arnold's release. They were denounced as little more than hoaxes and attempts to cash in on her grief-stricken family's misfortune.

By late January, police still believed that Dorothy Arnold was alive and that she would reappear at a time of her own choosing. The reason they believed she was still alive was because neither her body nor any of her personal effects had turned up. They also did not believe she had committed suicide or left with anyone, but her family didn't share that belief. They suggested that police search Central Park thoroughly, since it was thought that she might have walked home through the park. Francis Arnold thought that his daughter's body might lie in the depths of the lake, but police did not agree. In the five days before her disappearance, temperatures had been between 21 and 28 degrees Fahrenheit. It was freezing for at least a week, and people were skating on the lake the same day that she went missing. Police conducted a search of the lake despite their skepticism, but no sign of Arnold turned up.

Then the family received word that Dorothy Arnold had been spotted climbing into a strange car on East Seventy-Ninth Street and Park Avenue the day of her disappearance. A man and woman were already inside. In early February, John W. Arnold and family lawyer John S. Keith went to Philadelphia to investigate the information they had received, but it, too, proved to be unfounded. Francis Arnold gave up hope of ever finding his daughter alive. "It is the silence of death," he told the *New York Times* as he wept. He believed that she had been the victim of foul play, but he was not prepared to give up the search for her body yet.

On February 6, 1911, nearly two months after Dorothy Arnold had been last seen, the New York City police department decided to drop

the case. Her father had received a postcard that was signed “Dorothy.” It read, “I am safe,” and was postmarked New York City. The writing resembled hers, but Francis Arnold dismissed it as a cruel joke. He said that someone had copied her handwriting from samples printed in newspapers. Her family denied that she had been found.

A man who claimed to be John Byrnes telephoned police headquarters to say that his friend Joseph McDermott was taking Dorothy Arnold to the theater that night in Brooklyn. Six Brooklyn detectives rushed to the theater. They were stationed on the balcony while six Manhattan detectives kept watch on the ground floor. They stayed to the end of the final act. As patrons filed out, detectives scanned each woman’s face, but none resembled Dorothy. An examination of the telephone directory revealed that there was no John Byrnes listed for the address the man had given when he called police.

## POLICE ABANDON THE INVESTIGATION

Although the police had abandoned the investigation except for following up on new leads, interest in Arnold’s disappearance continued. A throng of reporters met the steamship *Berlin* when it docked in New York in early February with George C. Griscom Jr. aboard. The 42-year-old from a well-to-do Pittsburgh family said that he had returned home from Italy to assist with the search and help find Arnold. Then Griscom went with his parents to Atlantic City. While they changed trains in Jersey City, he appealed to railroad officials for protection from the trail of journalists in his wake. A special policeman walked over to the group of reporters and told them not to annoy the passenger. Then Griscom went into the office of a friend said to be working for the rail company. He emerged with just enough time to buy a ticket for Atlantic City and board the train.

Mrs. Arnold returned from Europe three days later on the Cunard liner *Pannonia*. A throng of reporters waited on shore to speak with her, but son John boarded the ship ahead of them and went to her stateroom. He wanted to protect her from the media and restricted the type of questions that journalists were allowed to ask. “My sister is not on board and that’s all there is to it,” he told them, putting an end to speculation that Dorothy Arnold had been located in Europe. In a brief interview Mrs. Arnold said that she would not consent to a marriage between her daughter and Griscom Jr.

On February 15, 1911, newspapers reported that Dorothy Arnold had pawned some of her jewelry during a trip to Boston the previous September. She was staying at the Hotel Lenox when she received \$500 from the Collateral Loan Company for her gold watch and chain, two diamond rings, and two bracelets. She gave the pawnbrokers her name and address. Her family denied the story, and her brother said that she did not possess any diamonds. Helen Kempton, one of her friends from Bryn Mawr College, did confirm that Dorothy was in Boston at the time that the jewelry was pawned. Arnold had obtained permission from her family to go to Boston to visit her former college friend Theodora Bates.

However, during that trip Dorothy's friend George C. Griscom Jr. was staying at the Essex Hotel. The two of them spent much time together. Both left their hotels on September 24 after paying their respective bills. When her disappearance was announced four months later, a Boston police inspector remembered seeing her name on slips that the loan company had turned over to police headquarters. He located the jewelry, which a family member went to Boston to pick up.

By late February, deputy police commissioner Flynn concluded that Dorothy Arnold was dead. "That now seems the only reasonable way of looking at the case," he told the *New York Times*. "In view of all that has been done to find her and the great publicity that has been given the case not only throughout the United States but in foreign countries as well. The girl has now been missing for 75 days and in all that time not a single clue has been found that was worth the name. Not a single person has seen the girl so far as we have been able to learn. Although hundreds have reported seeing persons who looked like her, in every case the clue was quickly run down and proved worthless." However, he believed her death was the result of suicide, not murder. "We have no evidence that a crime has been committed and the case is now one of a missing person, and nothing more."

The lakes in Central Park were dragged in the spring, but her body was not found. Her family finally conceded that Dorothy Arnold was never coming back, family lawyer John S. Keith told the *New York Times*. "There is practically no hope entertained by any of them," he said. "Still, every few days, when a faint clue—so unpromising that it would not have been given a second thought formerly—drifts in, Mrs. Arnold is roused for a few hours into feverish hopefulness. A few hours later her hopes are invariably dashed. Some of the clues have come from distant cities but all have proved fruitless."

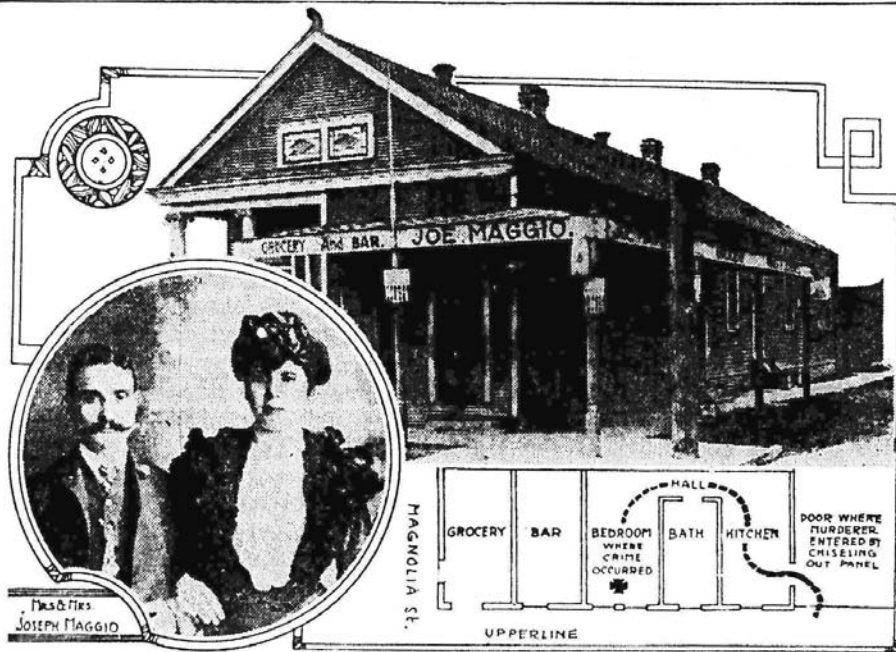
Still, police took seriously a lead they received in April 1916. A prisoner at the Rhode Island Penitentiary called E. C. Genmorris claimed that he had helped bury a girl he believed to be Arnold in the cellar of a house near West Point. Police inspector Joseph Faurot had the cellar dug up, but no body was found. In May 1921 the chief of police in Reno, Nevada, sent a message to the New York City police chief saying that a suite of rooms had been reserved in Reno for a woman named Dorothy Arnold. The reservation was then cancelled. The Arnold family placed no credence in the information; Dorothy Ingraham, a young Connecticut woman, had recently claimed to be the missing heiress.

By the time Francis Arnold passed away in 1922, at least \$100,000 had been spent on the search for his missing daughter, but he accepted the likelihood that she was dead. In his will, dated May 1919, he said, "I have made no provisions in this will for my beloved daughter Dorothy H. C. Arnold as I am satisfied that she is not alive." What really happened to Dorothy Arnold will likely never be known.

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## SCENE OF LATEST NEW ORLEANS MURDER



Joseph Maggio and his wife, from a photograph taken on their wedding day fifteen years ago, and the house in which they were killed while asleep in their bed.

The mysterious Axeman of New Orleans terrorized the city's residents. Courtesy *Times Picayune*.

# Killing Spree: The Axeman of New Orleans (1918–1919)

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*The series of attacks that terrorized New Orleans between 1918 and 1919 illustrate how an event can spark stories and legends that make it difficult to get to the truth. Perhaps these legends are part of a search for an explanation to an event that marked a community.*

Andrew Maggio was out celebrating. The barber had just received his draft notice and would be joining his countrymen overseas on the battlefields of World War I. After an evening of drinking, he staggered back to the New Orleans home he shared with his brothers and fell into bed drunk in the wee hours of May 23, 1918.

His brother Jake woke up a few hours later at 5 AM to the sound of groaning and strange noises coming from the other side of the wall that separated his bedroom from that of his brother Joseph and Joseph's wife. The couple had been married for 15 years and operated a small grocery store on Magnolia and Upperline Streets.

Jake Maggio climbed out of bed and woke up Andrew, which was no easy task given Andrew's inebriated state. The two of them went to their brother's room to investigate. Joseph was lying on the bed, barely alive. He tried to get up when he saw his brothers, but fell half out of bed. His wife was lying on the floor, her head almost decapitated. A shocked Andrew and Jake called the police immediately. Upon arriving on the scene, officers noticed that someone had chiseled a panel from the apartment's back door and climbed inside. Using Maggio's own axe, the intruder then struck the couple once each before slitting their throats with a razor. The razor was left on the bedroom floor in a pool of blood. The bloody axe lay on the steps that led to the backyard.

Police didn't believe that robbery was the motive for the assault. The small safe in the bedroom was open and empty, but at least \$100 in cash was tucked beneath Maggio's bloody pillow. Mrs. Maggio's jewelry, including several diamond rings, sat in a small pile on the dresser. It appeared that the safe had been left open only to make it look like a robbery had taken place.

Just as the police were surveying the crime scene, a neighbor told them that he had seen Andrew arrive home sometime between two and three in the morning. Andrew and Jake were arrested. Police released Jake the next day, and Andrew was let go on May 26, when investigators realized that they had no evidence that the two brothers were involved in the murders. Local newspapers were covering the murder and the ensuing investigation. The *Times-Picayune* even ran a photo on its front

page depicting the room where the Maggios had been sleeping when the attack happened. Andrew was devastated by the loss of his brother. As he told a reporter for the *Times-Picayune*, “It’s a terrible thing to be charged with the murder of your own brother when your heart is already broken by his death. I had been drinking heavily. I was too drunk even to have heard any noise next door.”

Curiously, detectives found an unusual message written in chalk on the sidewalk a block away from the Maggio residence. It read, “Mrs. Maggio is going to sit up tonight just like Mrs. Toney.” Police had no idea what the phrase meant, but the *New Orleans States* claimed that there had been a “veritable epidemic” of unsolved axe murders in 1911. According to them, the victims were Italian grocers named Cruti, Rosetti (allegedly killed with his wife), and Tony Schiambra (whose spouse was also reportedly murdered).

However, there is some debate as to the accuracy of this information. According to author Michael Newton, the New Orleans coroner’s records and police reports do not list the deaths of anyone by the names of Cruti or Schiambra for 1911. It does list a black woman called Mary Rosetti, who died of dysentery. Newton said there were 16 unsolved axe murders in Louisiana in 1911, but every victim was black and none of the killings took place in New Orleans. On the other hand, researcher William Kingman further investigated official records. He said a Mr. Crutti was killed in August 1910, but the cause of death was not listed. Anthony and Johanna Sciambra (or Schiambra, in some reports) were found shot to death in their home during May 1912. Mr. and Mrs. Davi were hacked in June 1911, but only Mr. Davi died. The Rissetos were attacked in September 1910.

## ATTACK ON BESUMER

A little more than a month after the Maggio killings, baker John Zanca arrived at grocer Louis Besumer’s store at 7 AM on June 28, 1918, to deliver bread and cakes. Besumer’s store was still closed, so Zanca went around the back to Besumer’s living quarters. He planned to unload his delivery there, but then stopped when he got closer to the back door. Someone had chiseled out a pane in the door’s lower portion. Worried, Zanca knocked on the door. Fifty-nine-year-old Besumer answered, blood pouring from a head wound. Zanca entered the apartment. Twenty-nine-year-old divorcée Anna Lowe, who was believed to be Besumer’s wife, was



lying on the bed unconscious and critically wounded. She had been hit with an axe. Zanca phoned the Charity Hospital and police for help.

Detectives found significant amounts of blood on the gallery that ran along one side of the living quarters. They believed that Lowe had been attacked there, and then she either dragged herself or was carried back to the bed. Besumer's bloody axe was found in the bathroom. He told police that he was asleep when someone hit him. When he regained consciousness, he saw that Lowe was lying on the gallery. He carried her to the bed and was about to call for an ambulance when Zanca arrived at the back door. The Polish-born grocer also told police that Lowe was not his wife. She had come from Jacksonville, Florida, with him three months earlier and they had lived together ever since. Police believed that the case was linked to the string of axe murders.

A black employee of Besumer, Lewis Oubicon, was held for questioning in the attacks, but the police's attention would soon shift to Besumer himself. In a trunk inside the apartment, they found letters to Besumer that were written in German, Russian, and Yiddish. The headline in the June 29 *Times-Picayune* read, "Spy Nest Suspected!" The *New Orleans States* joined in the same day. It asked if Besumer was a German spy. A man who had been the victim of a violent assault suddenly became the focus of police attention for another reason. Government officials began investigating him as a possible spy. When Besumer went to visit Lowe in the hospital, he was not allowed to see her.

Meanwhile, the critically wounded Lowe was in and out of consciousness for the next seven weeks. She was at times delirious and made a statement to police that she thought Besumer was a German spy. Police arrested Besumer, but he was released a few days later when she recanted. Lowe also gave police differing accounts of the attack. In one version she was lying in bed, and in another she was on the gallery. She died on August 5, 1918, two days after doctors at Charity Hospital performed surgery on her. As she lay dying, she said that Besumer was the man who had attacked her. Police arrested him and charged him with murder. Besumer went on trial on April 30, 1919. After nine months behind bars, he was acquitted after a jury had deliberated for only 10 minutes on May 1, 1919.

## SCHNEIDER ATTACK

The day that Anna Lowe died, Ed Schneider returned home late from work after midnight. When he turned on the bedroom light, he found

his pregnant wife lying unconscious in their bed. Her scalp had been cut open, and her face and head were covered in blood. She was rushed to hospital, where she delivered a healthy baby girl a week later. Her only memory of the attack was of a dark shadow standing beside her bed and the axe coming down before she screamed and lost consciousness. Police never found the axe that was used in the attack, and a panel in the door had not been chiseled out. In fact, the intruder appeared to have entered the house through a window, but nothing was stolen.

## ATTACK ON ROMANO

Less than a week after Mrs. Schneider was attacked, sisters Mary, 13, and Pauline Bruno, 18, woke up just after 3 AM on August 10, 1918. They were startled by a commotion in the adjacent room belonging to their uncle Joseph Romano. It sounded like there was a struggle in progress, with blows and scuffling. When the two teenage girls rushed over to investigate, they discovered that he had a serious head wound with two big cuts. They also saw his assailant fleeing the scene. They described him as “dark, tall, heavy-set, wearing a dark suit and a black slouch hat.” After his attacker had fled, Joseph Romano tried to climb out of bed. He fell to the floor in the adjoining parlor, and his nieces helped him into a chair before he fainted. They phoned the Charity Hospital and Romano was able to walk to the ambulance when it arrived, but he died two days later from his head wounds. Although Maggio’s bedroom had been ransacked, nothing in Romano’s house was stolen. A bloody axe was found in the backyard, however, and a panel had been cut out of the back door. A serial murderer was clearly on the loose.

The spate of axe murders set off a wave of panic in New Orleans for the rest of August 1918. Residents were haunted by the idea of a shadowy figure hanging over their bed with an axe while they slept. They began flooding the police with reports of seeing the axeman, of panels cut out from back doors, and of finding axes that had been discarded. Grocer Al Durand said that he had found an axe outside his back door on the morning of August 11. Another grocer who lived a block from Romano’s home said that someone had cut a panel from his back door when he wasn’t home on July 28. Yet a third grocer, who lived about six blocks from the murdered grocer, told police that the panel in one of his doors had been removed in June.

Retired police detective Joseph Dantonio jumped into the fray. In newspaper coverage he described the axeman as “a modern Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” He went on to explain that “a criminal of this type may be a respectable, law-abiding citizen when his normal self. Compelled by an impulse to kill, he must obey this urge. . . . Like Jack the Ripper, this sadist may go on with his periodic outbreaks until his death. For months, even for years, he may be normal, then go on another rampage.”

Fear among the city’s residents escalated. On August 22, the *New Orleans States* newspaper reported, “Armed men are keeping watch over their sleeping families while the police are seeing to solve the mysteries of the ax attacks. Five victims have fallen under the dreadful blows of this weapon within the last few months. Extra police are being put to work daily.”

There were no more attacks that summer. Eventually, the public’s attention shifted towards peace in Europe and the end of World War I in November 1918.

## CORTIMIGLIA ATTACK

The axeman struck again on March 10, 1919, in Gretna, just across the Mississippi River from New Orleans. Grocer Iorlando Jordano rushed across the street from his home when he heard screams from the living quarters of grocer Charles Cortimiglia. When he opened the door, he found Rose Cortimiglia with blood streaming from a head wound. She was clutching her two-year-old daughter, Mary, in her arms. Husband Charles lay nearby on the floor, bleeding profusely. An intruder had used Cortimiglia’s axe to attack the family. He first struck Charles and Rose before attacking Mary. Then he fled, leaving the weapon behind.

Jordano tried to clean the couple’s faces with wet towels from the bathroom while he sent his son Frank to call an ambulance. Little Mary was dead, but her parents survived and were rushed to the Charity Hospital with fractured skulls. Nothing had been stolen from the Cortimiglia home, but their bloody axe was found on the back steps and a panel had been removed from the back door.

Charles was released from the hospital a few days later, but Rose remained under medical care. She told police that Iorlando Jordano and his son Frank were to blame for the attacks on her family. Frank, 18, who was about to be married, was more than six feet tall and weighed over 200 pounds. He was too big to fit through the panel of a door. Jordano was 69 years old and in poor health. Charles firmly denied

his wife's accusation, but police arrested and jailed the neighbors until they could be tried for the murder of Mary Cortimiglia. The two men would go on trial in May.

## LETTER FROM THE AXEMAN

The latest attacks revived public concerns about the axeman, but residents also turned to humor to deal with their oppressive fear of the stranger who was stalking their city. A New Orleans composer wrote a song called "The Mysterious Axeman's Jazz," and some New Orleanians held "Axman" parties. They did not have to wait much longer to hear from someone who purported to be the axeman.

On March 14, 1919, the *Times-Picayune* published a letter that read:

*Esteemed Mortal:*

*They have never caught me and they never will. They have never seen me, for I am invisible, even as the ether that surrounds your earth. I am not a human being, but a spirit and a fell demon from the hottest hell. I am what you Orleanians and your foolish police call the Axeman.*

*When I see fit, I shall come again and claim other victims. I alone know who they shall be. I shall leave no clue except my bloody axe, besmeared with the blood and brains of him whom I have sent below to keep me company.*

*If you wish you may tell the police not to rile me. Of course I am a reasonable spirit. I take no offense at the way they have conducted their investigation in the past. In fact, they have been so utterly stupid as to amuse not only me but His Satanic Majesty, Francis Josef, etc. But tell them to beware. Let them not try to discover what I am, for it were better that they were never born than to incur the wrath of the Axeman. I don't think there is any need of such a warning, for I feel sure the police will always dodge me, as they have in the past. They are wise and know how to keep away from all harm.*

*Undoubtedly, you Orleanians think of me as a most horrible murderer, which I am, but I could be much worse if I wanted to. If I wished, I could pay a visit to your city every night. At will I could slay thousands of your best citizens, for I am in close relationship to the Angel of Death.*

*Now, to be exact, at 12:15 (earthly time) on next Tuesday night, I am going to visit New Orleans again. In my infinite mercy, I am going to make a proposition to you people. Here it is:*

*I am very fond of jazz music, and I swear by all the devils in the nether regions that every person shall be spared in whose home a jazz band is in full swing at the time I have mentioned. If everyone has a jazz band going, well, then, so much the better for you people. One thing is certain and that is that some of those people who do not jazz it on Tuesday night (if there be any) will get the axe.*

*Well, as I am cold and crave the warmth of my native Tartarus, and as it is about time that I leave your earthly home, I will cease my discourse. Hoping that thou wilt publish this, and that it may go well with thee, I have been, am and will be the worst spirit that ever existed either in fact or realm of fantasy.*

#### *The Axeman*

In response to the letter, New Orleans residents, who were already prone to raucous celebrations, increased their efforts on Tuesday, March 19, St. Joseph's Night. That evening the city's clubs and cabarets overflowed with patrons. Residents held parties in their homes. New Orleans was alive with music as sounds of jazz and numerous renditions of "The Mysterious Axeman's Jazz" filled the air everywhere. The evening ended without an attack by the axeman.

Two months later, on May 21, 1919, Iorlando and Frank Jordano went on trial in Gretna for the murder of Mary Cortimiglia. Friends and neighbors of the victims and the accused packed the courtroom. Rose Cortimiglia was dressed in black and sat apart from her husband. She and Charles had separated after she accused the Jordanos of the attack on her family. In the court before Judge John H. Fleury, she again fingered the Jordanos. Charles said that he had seen his attacker and it was neither of the Jordanos. After the five-day trial, the jury deliberated for 45 minutes before it found the two men guilty. On May 26, young Frank Jordano was sentenced to hang, and his elderly father Iorlando was sentenced to life in prison. Charles Cortimiglia divorced his wife after the trial.

## ATTACKS CONTINUE

The attacks continued. On August 10, 1919, grocer Steve Boca woke up to see a dark form looming over his bed. Then he passed out. When he regained consciousness, he staggered from his house and went looking for help. His head was cracked open and blood was pouring out.

He banged on the door of his friend Frank Genusa. When the door opened, Boca collapsed into his friend's arms. Genusa called an ambulance and Boca was taken to Charity Hospital. As with the other attacks, someone had chiseled a panel from the back door to Boca's home, but nothing was missing. The bloody axe was found in the kitchen. Boca recovered, but he remembered nothing about his attacker that could help police catch him.

Fear continued to grip New Orleans. On September 2, a pharmacist was reading at home late in the evening when he heard a noise. It sounded like someone was at his back door. He grabbed his revolver and called out repeatedly. No response. He fired through the door. There was still no response. He stepped outside to have a look but saw nothing. The police were called. When they arrived, they spotted what appeared to be the marks of a chisel on one panel of the door.

The following day, the neighbors of 19-year-old Sarah Laumann went to check on her. The young woman lived alone. Neighbors broke into her home when she didn't answer the door and found her lying unconscious on the bed. She was suffering from a head injury and several teeth were missing. An intruder—perhaps the axeman or an imitator—had climbed into her bedroom through an open window. He left a bloody axe on the lawn just below the window. Laumann recovered but had no memory of her attacker.

More than three weeks later, the axeman struck again. On October 27, 1919, a woman woke up in the early hours of the morning when she heard a struggle happening in the next room where her husband slept. As she opened the door, she saw a man exit through another door. Her husband, Mike Pepitone, was lying in bed covered with blood. The wall and a picture of the Virgin Mary just above the bed were both splattered with blood. Mrs. Pepitone shrieked, which awakened her six young children. Someone had cut a panel from the back door and left the bloody axe on the back porch. Now their father was dead and Mrs. Pepitone wasn't able to clearly describe his attacker.

Then the crime spree ended just as mysteriously as it had begun, but the story did not die. More than a year later, on December 7, 1920, Rose Cortimiglia publicly admitted that she had falsely accused Iorlando and Frank Jordano of her daughter's murder. She said that she had blamed them because of spite and jealousy on her part. She had since contracted smallpox and said she was confessing in hopes of being forgiven. The only evidence against the Jordanos was her testimony. After she recanted her story, the two men were released from prison.

It is said that another drama had unfolded a week earlier, on December 2, 1920, in Los Angeles. Former New Orleans resident Joseph Mumfre was ambushed and shot to death on a street corner. A woman dressed in black and wearing a veil had stepped out of the shadows of the doorway of a building and emptied her gun. She later told police she was the widow of Mike Pepitone and that Mumfre had murdered him. She pleaded guilty to Mumfre's murder and was sentenced to 10 years in prison in April 1921. She served three years and was released.

Police investigated the possibility that Mumfre was the axeman of New Orleans. They discovered that he was a habitual criminal who had been in and out of jail for 10 years. During the axeman's hiatus from August 1918 to March 1919, Mumfre had been incarcerated for burglary. He left New Orleans just after Pepitone was killed, but there is no evidence that links Mumfre directly to the murders. The theory that he was the axeman is purely circumstantial.

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Joseph Bowne Elwell rose to fame as a bridge-whist expert. Library of Congress.

## **The Wizard of Whist: The Murder of Joseph Bowne Elwell (1920)**

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*Joseph Bowne Elwell's body was found inside a locked house; he had been shot. Thanks to the emerging field of ballistics, police investigators were able to determine that the bridge-whist expert's death was the result of murder—not suicide.*

Joseph Bowne Elwell arrived at the rooftop restaurant on the fifteenth floor of New York City's Ritz-Carlton Hotel. He left his tophat in the cloakroom and joined his friends at a table on the perimeter of the dance floor. It was 8 PM on June 10, 1920, and he was having dinner with William and Selma Lewisohn, her sister Viola Kraus, and Buenos Aires journalist Octavio Figueroa. Kraus's divorce decree had become final that very day. An hour later they noticed that her ex-husband, Victor von Schlegell, was sitting at a nearby table with Elly Hope Anderson, who was dressed in black.

Forty-six-year-old Elwell had done well for himself. While he was still a teenager, he quit school and began working as a clerk for a firm of insurance brokers. He later became an insurance agent. While attending services at the Tompkins Avenue Congregational Church, he convinced the pastor to set up a young men's club. Activities included whist-drives—during which Elwell discovered his talent for the card game of whist, popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Others did, too. They nicknamed him “The wizard of whist.” He also learned bridge-whist and began playing for money.

Elwell was soon spending more and more time playing cards—and less time selling insurance. He and his wife Helen also came up with the idea of earning income by tutoring others in the intricacies of the game, and so Elwell began making additional money by teaching people in high society how to play. A growing number of them were women. He also wrote instructional books such as *Elwell on Bridge*.

Along the way, Elwell began investing in racehorses and property in Palm Beach, Florida. He became somewhat of a ladies' man, and in 1916 he and his wife separated. Their 15-year-old son Richard went to live with his mother. Elwell was a wealthy man and a successful speculator, and among his possessions were a yacht, five cars, and a stable of more than 20 racehorses. By 1920, Elwell wanted a divorce. Several weeks before his evening at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, he told his estranged wife that he would increase her allowance from \$200 to \$350 if she agreed to a divorce. He also said that he would make generous provisions for their son. Helen Elwell had not yet replied.

After enjoying an evening of dining and dancing at the rooftop restaurant, Elwell left the Lewisohn party at about 11 PM and went to the New Amsterdam Theater to buy the five of them tickets for Ziegfeld's *Midnight Frolic*. His friends joined him before the curtain went up at 11:30 PM. After the show, the Lewisohns, Kraus, and Figueroa climbed into a taxi in front of the New Amsterdam Theater and headed home at about 1:45 AM.

After making plans to see his friends again later that afternoon, Elwell headed home by himself. He lived in a four-story house with a granite front, one of eight houses built in a row. The vestibule inside was about four feet long and led to a glass-paneled door that opened onto the main hallway. The drawing room was eight feet from the inner door on the right. A person entering the hallway could see the whole interior of the drawing room through a long mirror over an open fireplace.

Elwell usually arrived home at about 1 AM, woke up at about 8:30 AM, and ate breakfast. Then he generally went to visit his broker to check on his stock transactions. He didn't tend to eat his other meals at home unless women friends came to visit. Just before going to bed that night, he removed his false teeth and toupee—as he always did. He wasn't expecting any visitors at that late hour.

Milkman Jost Otten climbed up the front steps at about 6:30 AM. The double doors were unlocked when he opened them and dropped off a pint of milk and a half-pint of cream inside the vestibule. He pulled the door closed behind him and continued on his delivery rounds. The mailman arrived with the mail nearly an hour later, at approximately 7:25 AM. He usually shoved the envelopes under the storm door, but since it wasn't locked that morning, he tossed about four letters inside the vestibule and closed the inner door. He rang the bell twice to indicate that he had left mail.

## SCENE OF THE CRIME

When Elwell's housekeeper, Marie Larsen, arrived at about 8:35 AM the storm door and the inside door were both locked. She took out her key, let herself in, and stepped inside the vestibule. Then she closed the doors behind her and walked down the hall to the kitchen with the milk and cream. Elwell was usually still sleeping at that hour. She took off her wraps and retraced her steps to the drawing room to tidy up before he requested breakfast.

As she was about to enter the room, Larsen realized that she was not alone. Normally Elwell did not awaken until after she had arrived. When she had come to work at 8:30 the previous morning, he was sitting in his armchair reading the morning's mail and his newspapers. He was wearing black slippers and a black and purple housecoat over red silk pajamas.

This time, a barefoot Elwell was sitting in an upholstered chair in his red silk pajamas. Larsen apologized for intruding, but he didn't reply. Then she noticed that he was bleeding from a bullet wound to the forehead. The back of his chair was up against the wall. His chin was resting on his chest while the back of his head was wedged against the top of the chair and the wall. A bullet protruded from the scattered plaster about three inches above Elwell's head. Both of his arms rested on the side of the chair, a partly open letter from horse trainer Lloyd Gentry on his lap. Drops of blood from his wound had landed on the letter. The envelope and three other letters lay at his feet. Elwell's eyes were shut but his lids quivered as he fought for breath. His gaping mouth revealed only three teeth.

Larsen rushed outside, and the first person whom she saw was milkman Otten. She told him to go get a policeman, but he didn't move from his cart. She ran down the street to the drugstore at the corner of Broadway and Seventieth Streets and fetched patrolman Harry Singer. She told him that she needed an ambulance. She believed that burglars had shot her employer because three men had been arrested about a year earlier while trying to force their way into the house.

Singer accompanied Larsen back to Elwell's house and quickly examined the body and surveyed the scene. There was no sign of a pistol, and the housekeeper assured him that she had not seen one, nor had she touched anything in the room. Singer's initial assessment was that Elwell had shot himself. The officer went back outside and asked Otten to find a vehicle in which to transport Elwell, and then come inside to help him move the whist expert. "Give me a hand with this fellow—he can't live very long," Singer said.

Otten rushed inside the house. He and the patrolman were about to lift Elwell, who was six feet tall and weighed about 185 pounds, when the police officer noticed the bullet wound in Elwell's head. Then he found the shell from a .45-caliber cartridge on the floor and decided to leave Elwell where he was. This was no suicide, he concluded, it was an attempted murder. Singer phoned Captain Thomas F. Walsh at the police station to come and investigate. Walsh and half a dozen detectives

arrived on the scene a few minutes before an ambulance from Flowers Hospital pulled up. Elwell was admitted to Bellevue Hospital at 9:20 AM. There was little anyone could do but make the man as comfortable as possible until he died. He passed away about an hour after being admitted.

## **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

Meanwhile, the investigation into Elwell's murder was already underway. Chief medical examiner Dr. Charles Norris arrived at the house a few minutes after Elwell was taken to the hospital. He examined the room where the victim was shot. By the time Norris returned to the morgue, Elwell's body had been brought there.

Norris conducted an autopsy, which revealed that the bullet had entered Elwell's forehead, exited through the back of his head, and lodged in the wall behind the chair in which he was sitting when Larsen found him. The medical examiner said that it would be unusual for such a wound to be self-inflicted. Elwell was shot while sitting in the chair, and he immediately lost consciousness. He was believed to have been murdered between 7:30 AM and 8:50 AM. Based on the wound and the amount of time Elwell survived in Bellevue Hospital, Norris concluded that he must have been shot 10 or 15 minutes before the housekeeper's arrival at about 8:35 AM. It also appeared that the gun had been held no more than three feet from Elwell. Judging by the position of his body, the medical examiner concluded that the victim was likely caught by surprise when he was shot.

Captain Walsh, senior detective of the precinct at the New York Police Department, took charge of the detectives in the investigation. He was puzzled by the absence of a weapon. Something else was odd. Police questioned neighbors, but nobody said that they had heard the fatal shot or saw anything unusual. Neither did two painters who began working next door to Elwell's home that morning at 8 AM.

Otten the milkman told police that he neither saw nor heard anything unusual that morning. He did not see anyone near the house when he delivered milk nor when he passed by a second time while bringing milk to the house across the street. Yet, the room in which Elwell was shot was only eight feet from the sidewalk. How could it be that nobody heard the gun go off? Perhaps it was muffled in some way, Walsh reasoned.

Despite the absence of a weapon, detectives explored the possibility that Elwell had shot himself. Grains of powder that had been found

embedded in his forehead and face covered a diameter of three inches. Police conducted ballistics tests at their headquarters using a Colt .45 automatic pistol to shoot at blotter paper from different distances. The cartridges were loaded with smokeless powder, similar to that which killed Elwell. Investigators wanted to determine at what distance powder makes the same pattern as was found on Elwell's forehead and face. Their tests revealed that a lack of powder burns suggested the muzzle of the gun was held more than a foot away from the forehead when the trigger was pulled. That ruled out suicide. Discussions with Kraus and the Lewisohns also indicated that Elwell had shown no signs of difficulties.

As Elwell's father, 82-year-old Joseph E. Elwell, told the *New York Times*, "The fact stands out that the pistol with which my son was killed was not found in the house nor is there the slightest evidence that my son arose from the chair in which he was seated at the time of the shooting. Even if he were able to get out of the chair to dispose of the pistol he could not have hidden it in such a way that it could not be found after a search so thorough as that conducted by the detectives in the last thirty-six hours."

Word of Elwell's death spread quickly. Within hours of his body being found, a woman arrived at his house and rushed upstairs. She wanted to remove evidence of her previous presence by sneaking her items of clothing out of the house. But she changed her mind and left immediately when she saw detectives on the second floor. By then, Larsen had already found and hidden a pink silk gown, a cap, and slippers. As she later admitted to police, she wanted to shield their female owner from publicity.

At noon that day, Viola Kraus phoned Elwell. They had agreed to accompany Selma Lewisohn to her house in Elwood Park, New Jersey, to play golf that Friday afternoon and Saturday. Elwell had asked them to phone him regarding the pickup time for the trip. Kraus was calling to say that they would pick him up at 2:30 PM. A man answered when the phone rang, but it wasn't Elwell. "If you are a friend of Mr. Elwell's you'll come here at once," the man told Kraus. She was puzzled by the cryptic message. "Mr. Elwell is very, very sick, and he needs your help right away. He wants you to come at once." Hordes of reporters were milling around the house when she and Selma Lewisohn arrived. Detectives questioned the two women and learned that they had last seen Elwell at 1:45 AM in front of the New Amsterdam Theater. Where had he been from then until he was found at 8:30 AM, they wondered.

## RETRACING ELWELL'S STEPS

Police decided that they needed to retrace Elwell's steps. They canvassed taxi companies to investigate the calls that they had received between 11:30 PM on Thursday to 8:30 AM on Friday. They received a number of reports about where Elwell was believed to have been between the time that he left the Lewisohns and when he was shot. According to one, he took a taxicab to the Montmartre Restaurant on Broadway at Fiftieth Street and was met there by two men and a woman. A different story had Elwell stepping out of a high-powered greenish-blue racing vehicle at 3:45 AM in front of his home. He waved goodbye to a man at the wheel who then drove off. This was the version that police initially believed was most accurate.

Then taxi cab driver Edgar Walters said that he had picked up a fare at about 2 AM. They stopped at Sixty-Sixth Street to buy the *Morning Telegraph*, the New York paper that racing fans consulted. A copy of the newspaper with racing news was later found lying on the floor beside Elwell's bed. Then Walters and his fare continued on to 244 West Seventieth Street. Police concluded that Elwell had arrived home at 2:30 AM. Viola Kraus told police that she had phoned Elwell at that time. In keeping with his usual bedtime ritual, he changed from his dress clothes into his pajamas, took out his false teeth, and took off the toupee that covered his balding head.

Police then wondered whether someone else had arrived at Elwell's home at 3:45 AM, as a witness had suggested. The person driving the noisy vehicle that dropped someone off there at 3:45 AM never stepped forward to identify himself. They considered but then dropped the theory that Elwell had someone in his home for a few hours before his murder. He wasn't wearing his toupee and false teeth, and he wouldn't normally allow people to see him that way.

Detectives searched the house for clues. The silk sheets on Elwell's bed had not been disturbed, suggesting that he had not slept there. It was hot that night, however, and there were signs that he had slept on top of the covers. A number of cigarette butts were found in the bedroom. This showed that he, and perhaps someone else, had been smoking there. It appeared that he came downstairs barefoot and dressed in pajamas to pick up the mail. Whoever was watching the house entered then. Or perhaps Elwell left the front door open because it was hot and he was trying to cool down the house. Police questioned neighbors to find out if anyone

had been seen entering or leaving the Elwell residence after he had returned home, but nobody had seen anything.

Police were also trying to determine why Elwell had been murdered. Robbery wasn't the motive, as \$400 in cash and jewelry valued at more than \$7,000 were found on a bed in his room on the third floor. They appeared to have been found where he left them when he returned from Midnight Frolic. The police inspected the doors and windows, but none had been tampered with. The room where he was found was not lavishly furnished despite the wealth of its owner. It had three paintings of no value and a small wooden frame of Rudyard Kipling's poem "If." Detectives found no signs that a racetrack feud was the motive. According to Assistant District Attorney John F. Joyce, "They all say he was generous in all his dealings on the turf and had no enemies there," he told the *New York Times*.

When Larsen found Elwell, she noticed that the second chair was located in the middle of the room instead of in its usual place. It appeared that the murderer might have sat in it before shooting Elwell. At the bridge-whist expert's left side was a letter that he had received just that morning. It was from Lloyd Gentry, Elwell's head trainer at the Latonia racetrack in Kentucky. In it, Gentry gave a brief report of the condition of a few of the horses and the expenses involved in maintaining the stable. There were no signs of alarm or financial difficulties.

## SEARCHING FOR A MOTIVE

Friends and police believed that the shooter was a close acquaintance and that Elwell was talking to the person at the time he was shot. As William Barnes, Elwell's secretary and valet told the *New York Times*, "Mr. Elwell was murdered, and he was murdered by somebody with whom he was intimately acquainted. The slayer either entered the house with a key which had previously been provided by Mr. Elwell or was admitted by Mr. Elwell a few minutes before the shooting."

Chauffeur Edwin Rhodes said that several women had keys to Elwell's home and used them to come and go as they pleased. However, police never found any of the women said to have keys to the house. A few months earlier, three men had broken in through the basement door at 3 PM, but a neighbor spotted them and phoned police. The locksmith told police that the locks had been changed in December. The only two sets of keys that he subsequently issued were for Elwell and Larsen.

One thing was clear. Elwell enjoyed the company of women. Police found a pink silk negligee in a closet. The tag identifying the owner had been removed, and it had been carefully folded and placed in a gray, unmarked cardboard box. Larsen initially claimed that she never saw any of the women who visited Elwell, nor did she know the names of any of his female friends. After being questioned further, however, Larsen admitted that a young woman had visited him several days before the murder. She described her as being short, fat, young, and pretty, with dark eyes and hair. She was wearing a grey suit with fur trim at the bottom. Larsen had prepared a lunch of chops, tomatoes, and strawberry shortcake. After the young woman spent several hours with Elwell, a taxi arrived for her. Yet another woman, whom Elwell had met in Palm Beach earlier, was trying to get in touch with him before the Saratoga racing season began. All of the women were questioned, but none appeared to have anything to do with Elwell's murder.

Given that Elwell was a ladies' man, friends and police believed that a husband who had been wronged or a protective father had killed him. "There is not the slightest indication that the crime was based on gambling or any kind of money matters," district attorney Edward Swann told reporters. "It seems certain that it was committed by a man who was either instigated by a woman or who sought revenge on account of a woman."

Neighborhood gossip claimed that a husband who had been wronged had threatened Elwell's life. Investigators learned that about 10 days before he was killed in New York, Elwell had spent two weeks at the Latonia racetrack in Kentucky and met a woman called Anna. Detectives went to Lexington, Kentucky, after hearing that Anna's father or brother had threatened to shoot Elwell because of his affair with her, but police were unable to dig up any new leads and returned to New York.

Police initially believed that Elwell had been shot with an army-issue .45-caliber weapon. The cartridge that was found on the floor near the fireplace was sent to William Jones, a former captain in the New York Police Department who was now a consultant on firearms. He concluded that the marking Rem-U.M.C. on the cartridge was, in fact, that of the Remington Arms Company. If it were U.S. Army ammunition, it would have the initials of the arsenal and the date of manufacture on it. The firearms expert concluded that the cartridge was fired from one of three possible weapons: a Colt revolver, a Smith & Wesson revolver, or an automatic Colt pistol. The fact that the cartridge was ejected indicated the weapon was an automatic, which ejects a cartridge after every shot.



He also pointed out that no silencer could be used on any of the three weapons. He suggested that a woman would be unlikely to own this type of weapon, but she could have fired it if she had some experience.

Police wondered whether Viola Kraus's ex-husband Von Schlegell might have been involved since he had seen his former wife in Elwell's company the night before the murder. Could jealousy be the motive? They searched his apartment in the Knickerbocker Studios. Detectives found nothing but a dusty .38-caliber Colt automatic on a shelf in a closet. It had apparently been given to him as a gift and had not been fired in years.

Von Schlegell was then brought to the third floor of the Elwell residence for questioning. Unbeknownst to him, his former wife and the Lewisohns were on the second floor being interrogated by Assistant District Attorney John Joyce. Von Schlegell said that after his evening at the Ritz-Carlton he dropped off his female companion and arrived home at about midnight. His boss, Andrew Broughton, had asked him to attend the Master Car Builders convention in Atlantic City the next day. Ironically, Von Schlegell's own vehicle needed some repairs before the trip. He drove his car to a garage on Fifty-Eighth Street between Fifth and Madison Avenues to get the ignition fixed. The morning that Elwell's body was discovered, Elly Hope Anderson met Von Schlegell for breakfast at his apartment. She arrived at 8 AM, and they began eating 10 minutes later. She returned to her hotel afterwards. He packed his things and went to the garage at about 9:30 AM. His alibi checked out.

Another of the many women dragged in for questioning during the investigation was Polish countess Sonia de Szinswaska. She and her sister Amelia Hardy had been good friends with Elwell at one time, but they had not seen him in more than a year. They had been told that Elwell, a member of the American Protective League, was responsible for the detention of the Countess as a suspected spy during the war, but they did not know why he would do that. In fact, he had successfully lobbied officials in Washington, D.C., to have her released after two months.

After spending 16 hours interrogating people who knew Elwell, Assistant District Attorney Joyce confessed to reporters that investigators were at a loss for clues, a motive, and a possible suspect. "We have not learned anything which throws any light on the case or that points in the direction of any individual," he said. "All our clues lead up blind alleys and we appear to be no nearer a solution of the mystery than when the murder first occurred."

Elwell's murder generated more than front-page headlines. "We have had stacks of anonymous letters, each naming somebody against whom the writer had a grudge," said District Attorney Swann. "I guess nearly everybody with a grudge has tried to deliver the Elwell murderer to us. All sorts of respectable people, who never knew the man, have been named." These letters ate up investigators' time without bringing them any closer to a solution, as did a man who claimed to be the killer.

On April 11, 1921, Roy Harris, who was also known as Benny Leonard, said that he had murdered Elwell. His notoriety was short-lived. His wife told police that she was with her husband all day and evening at the time of Elwell's murder. Fingerprint experts who took prints from tables, doorknobs, and other surfaces throughout Elwell's house didn't turn up any useful information. Swann was baffled by the murder. "Boys," he told reporters, "it's the mystery case of the century." Elwell was buried in Ridgewood, New Jersey's Valleau Cemetery on June 15, 1920. His killer was never caught.

#### FURTHER READING

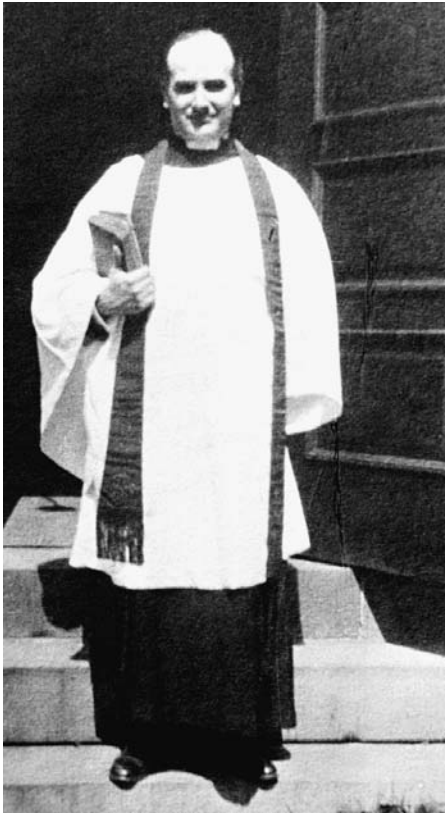
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The double-murder of the minister and the choir singer has never been solved. Bettmann/Corbis.

## **Married Lovers: The Murders of Edward Wheeler Hall and Eleanor Mills (1922)**

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*The trial into the double-murder of Edward Hall and Eleanor Mills marked one of the first times that reporters transmitted their courtroom stories by telegraph.*

Eleanor Mills walked over to a neighbor's house to return a telephone call that the minister of her church had made to her. Now in her thirties, she had married James Mills in 1905 when she was just 15 years old. They had two children, Charlotte and Danny. She was active in her church and had been in the choir since the age of 14.

Nine months earlier, in December 1921, Eleanor had had a kidney removed. Since her husband couldn't afford to pay for the surgery, the church's minister, Reverend Edward Hall, agreed to pay for it in installments. Mills needed to discuss the bill with him. Once she had completed her telephone call, she returned home. She put on her hat, scarf, and shawl, and left her four-room apartment at 7:30 PM on September 14, 1922. She didn't tell her husband, James, nor her two teenaged children where she was going. She boarded the trolley to the end of the line and walked towards De Russey's Lane, New Jersey.

Some five blocks from the Mills home, Reverend Hall finished eating dinner with his wife, Frances, and her brother Willie Stevens. He and Frances had married on July 20, 1911, when he was 30 and she was 37. They lived in a two-story red brick mansion just a few blocks from the Protestant Episcopal Church of St. John the Evangelist, where he was the minister. At about 7:30 PM, when Eleanor Mills left her house, Hall departed his after telling his wife and brother-in-law that he was going to see Mrs. Mills about a payment for her doctor's bill.

By 10:30 PM, Mills hadn't returned home. Her husband went to the church to look for her, but she wasn't there. She sometimes went away for a few days at a time, so he returned home and went to bed. He noticed the next morning at 5:45 AM that his wife hadn't returned home, but he didn't report her missing right then.

At 2:30 AM that same morning, Frances Hall knocked on her brother's bedroom door. Edward hadn't come home yet and she was worried. She told Willie that she wanted him to accompany her to the church to see if her husband was there. He dressed quickly. They stopped outside the church and noticed there were no lights on. Then they went to the Mills apartment. They waited for two or three minutes but there were no lights there, either. They returned home and resumed their search the next morning. That afternoon, Frances reported to police that her husband was missing.

## SCENE OF THE CRIME

On September 16, 1922, two days after Hall and Mills were last seen, 23-year-old Raymond Schneider and 15-year-old Pearl Bahmer were out walking at 10 AM near New Brunswick, New Jersey, when they stumbled upon two bodies lying on the ground under a crabapple tree on De Russey's Lane. The woman's head was resting on the man's right arm and her left hand lay on his knee. A Panama hat covered the man's face. It appeared that they had been killed first and then posed in that position afterwards.

Stunned at what they saw, Schneider and Bahmer raced off to tell the nearest neighbor, Grace Edwards. She phoned the police. When Patrolman Edward Garrigan arrived with Officer James Curran, they surveyed the scene and examined the two bodies, which were fully clothed. The man and woman had been shot to death, and the woman's throat had been slashed. A business card was propped up against the man's left heel. It was that of Reverend Edward W. Hall, the rector of the Protestant Episcopal Church of St. John the Evangelist in New Brunswick. A man's dark leather wallet lying on the ground contained a driver's license that belonged to Hall.

The woman was Eleanor R. Mills, 34, wife of the church's sexton. Torn shreds of paper were scattered around the bodies. According to author William Kunstler, it became evident that Hall was romantically involved with Mills, a soprano in the church choir. "I know there are girls with more shapely bodies, but I do not care what they have," Mills wrote in one letter. "I have the greatest of all blessings, the deep, true, and eternal love of a noble man. My heart is his, my life is his, all that I have is his . . . I am his forever." Police didn't find any weapons at the scene, but there were several cartridge shells from an automatic pistol.

An undertaker took the bodies away in a hearse that afternoon. While removing Hall's coat, a bullet fell to the floor. He had been shot once in the head while Mills was hit three times. Her throat had also been sliced from ear to ear. An autopsy determined that the couple had been killed at about 10 PM on September 14, 36 hours before their bodies were found. Judging by the angle of the wounds, Hall's killer stood over him when he was shot.

Hall's brother-in-law, Willie Stevens, was sitting in the parlor of the mansion he shared with his sister and Hall, reading the *New York Times*. His aunt, Mrs. Charles Carpender, arrived to announce that Edward had been shot. Willie dropped the paper, lowered his head,

and cried. Two days later, on September 18, more than 200 mourners filled St. John's, a small stone church, for Hall's funeral. Afterwards, he was buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. Only a handful of people turned up for Mills's funeral the next morning in a small chapel at the Hubbard Funeral Home.

## **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

Then the investigation into the double murder began in earnest. Police initially suspected that Mr. Mills, Mrs. Hall, and her two brothers, Willie and Henry Stevens, were behind the killings. Frances Hall and her brothers were questioned repeatedly. Although many of the church's parishioners knew about the affair between the minister and the choir singer, James Mills and Frances Hall each initially claimed to police that they had no idea it was happening. Three weeks before Mills had her surgery, Hall sent her a single red rose with a love note.

Frances Hall's brother Willie was known to have a fiery temperament. He also owned a .32-caliber revolver, although he claimed that it had not been fired in more than 10 years. When police examined the weapon, they determined that it was not capable of firing and then returned it to Stevens. Older brother Henry Stevens was a firearms expert who was once an exhibition marksman. He lived 50 miles from the scene of the murder.

Eleanor Mills and her family often went over to neighbor Millie Opie's home to use her telephone. Opie, a dressmaker, told police that Eleanor met Edward Hall almost every day at her apartment while her husband was at work. The reverend often parked his car across from the house. This latest titillating piece of information put the story of the double murder back on the front pages of newspapers.

Police were making little headway in the case, however. On September 27, Somerset County prosecutor Azariah Beekman announced at a news conference that he had applied to Supreme Court Justice Charles W. Parker to have the body of Eleanor Mills exhumed. He hoped to unearth more clues about how she died and who her killer could be. Her body was disinterred two days later and brought back to Hubbard's funeral home, where she had first been taken after her body was discovered.

Dr. Runkle Hegeman and Dr. Arthur L. Smith performed the autopsy on the mother of two teenagers. The two men confirmed that she had been shot three times in the head. Her head was nearly decapitated after

her throat was cut from ear to ear, and her windpipe and esophagus were severed. Two .32-caliber bullets were removed and turned over to Detective George D. Totten from the Somerset County prosecutor's office. Hall's body was exhumed a week later, on October 5. An autopsy revealed nothing new. Hall had been shot in the head through the right temple.

In the meantime, a reward of \$1,000 was offered for information leading to an arrest and conviction in the case. The money was put forward by Middlesex County's Board of Freeholders, with the stipulation that the reward would only be given out if the murder had been committed in Middlesex County. The reward was never claimed.

But curious bystanders and souvenir hunters were flocking to the scene of the crime. Crowds gathered on a Sunday in early October at the Phillips farm, near where the murders occurred, to watch members of the New Brunswick police and county detectives rake fall leaves in a desperate attempt to find the murder weapons. Even reporters got in on the act. They grabbed shovels, rakes, and axes, and searched the two wells on the property. No murder weapons were found, but some spectators did more than just watch. Souvenir hunters ripped out the old porch of the house on the property, and one person pulled out a windowpane and opened the front door. More souvenir hunters entered and destroyed furniture in their quest for souvenirs. Their presence was beginning to hinder the investigation.

On October 2, police learned that after the murders Mrs. Hall had sent some clothing to Philadelphia to be dyed. A clerk at Bornot's cleaning and dyeing plant said that they had received some garments from Mrs. Hall on September 20, six days after the double murder. The company dyed the items black and returned them to Mrs. Hall four days later.

## ARREST IN THE CASE

A week later investigators interrogated Raymond Schneider, Pearl Bahmer, Clifford Hayes, and Leon Kaufmann. Bahmer said that Schneider had brought her home at 9:30 PM on September 14, and then her inebriated father ordered her to accompany him as he walked off his intoxication. Detectives grilled Schneider and Hayes for 12 hours and then turned their attention to 16-year-old Kaufmann. On September 14, he had met Schneider and Hayes at 10:30 PM in front of the Rivoli Theater. They started following Bahmer and a drunken companion with whom she was walking. Hayes took a pistol out from a holster under his



sweater and said that he was going to fight the man who was accompanying Bahmer.

The youths followed the couple to the entrance of Buccleuch Park. Then they lost sight of Bahmer and her companion. They entered the park looking for them, but when they didn't find their quarry they left to walk around the neighborhood. They returned to the park at 11 PM, and Kaufmann left his friends behind. The prosecutor's office theorized that Hayes had been in love with Pearl Bahmer. It was theorized that Hayes stumbled upon Hall and Mills, then shot them in a mistaken belief they were Bahmer and another man.

The day that the body of Eleanor Mills was exhumed, Frances Hall hired Timothy N. Pfeiffer, a former assistant district attorney of New York County, to investigate her husband's death. Pfeiffer had not uncovered any new information by the time police announced on October 9, 1922, that they had arrested Clifford Hayes in connection with the double slaying and were charging him with murder. Hayes was brought to the Somerset County Jail. Police failed to explain why Hayes would have slashed Mills's throat, posed the bodies, and scattered the love letters around them.

The public was not convinced that the police had the right man behind bars. Detective Frank F. Kirby had induced Schneider to make the accusations against his friend Hayes. As Kirby tried to walk the four blocks from the train station to the courthouse in New Brunswick, people followed him hurling insults and throwing stones. A fund was set up to pay for Hayes's legal defense. Three days after Schneider made his accusations, he recanted his statement that Hayes had killed Hall and Mills. Following a hearing the next afternoon at 1:30 PM, the charges against Hayes were dropped and he was released.

Investigators turned their attention back to Frances Hall, her brothers, James Mills, and his 16-year-old daughter Charlotte. The young girl had recently sold a packet of her mother's love letters to the *New York American* for \$500. During the investigation, grand juries were convened in New Brunswick and Middlesex counties but no indictments were filed. The police appeared to be stumped.

## NEW WITNESS

Then a new witness stepped forward on October 24. Jane Gibson was a 50-year-old widow who lived with her son on a 60-acre hog farm. She told police that her dogs began to bark at about 9 PM on September 14.

This drew her attention to a person in her cornfield. She thought he was stealing her corn, so she mounted a mule and rode off after the prowler. She followed him into De Russey's Lane. That, she said, is when she saw four people at the scene of the Hall and Mills murder.

In the moonless darkness, it appeared that two men and two women were standing near a crabapple tree, silhouetted against the sky. Suddenly, there was the sound of a gunshot and one person fell to the ground. A woman cried, "Don't! Don't!" There were more gunshots and another person collapsed. As Gibson fled, she said she heard a woman shout, "Henry!" Gibson said that she had tried to share her story with police after Hayes was arrested, but they were not interested. Her story did not match the police's evidence and autopsy report that Edward Hall had been shot while he was lying on the ground.

Gibson, whom newspapers dubbed the "Pig Woman" because of her hog farm, added more details to her story. She said that she saw a touring car parked near the scene of the crime. The headlights of a second vehicle allowed her to get a good look at the four people she saw there. One of them was a woman wearing a long coat. Another person was a man with bushy hair and a dark mustache. Willie Stevens was about five feet ten inches tall, 54 years old, and had thick bushy hair.

Gibson also suddenly remembered that one woman had asked, "How do you explain these notes?" She added that Eleanor Mills had tried to run and hide but the killers caught up to her and dragged her back to the spot where the minister lay. She was shot three times. During a third interview, Gibson claimed that she had returned to the scene at 1 AM to try to find the moccasin she had lost when she fled home earlier that evening. When she approached the crabapple tree, she said she saw Mrs. Hall, whom she described as a woman with white hair, kneeling beside her husband's corpse and weeping loudly.

A neighbor, a Mrs. A. C. Fraley, lived across De Russey's Lane. She said that she was awake the night that Hall and Mills were both shot, yet she didn't remember hearing any shouting or the gunfire that Gibson described. When the neighbor spoke to Gibson the next morning, the "Pig Woman" made no mention of the shootings. Mrs. Fraley's boarders didn't mention it either. Gibson was also discredited after it was discovered that she had lied about her marital status. She claimed to be the widow of a minister, but her husband toolmaker William Easton was still very much alive and well.

In November 1922, Gibson claimed that the shooter was Henry Carpenter, Frances Hall's cousin, but Carpenter's alibi was solid. He told

police that he had dinner with his wife and some friends until 10:30 PM the night of the shooting. On November 20, 1922, a third grand jury was convened. They heard from 67 witnesses and adjourned five days later without making any indictments. And that is where the case rested until July 1926.

## CASE REOPENED

Louise Geist, Edward and Frances Hall's former maid, had married piano tuner Arthur S. Riehl in 1925. Ten months later, on July 3, 1926, Riehl filed a petition in the Court of Chancery in Trenton for an annulment. He said that Louise told him she had been working for the Halls at the time of the murder. According to Riehl, Geist had told Frances Hall that Edward Hall planned to elope with Eleanor Mills. Then the Hall's chauffeur drove Geist, Mrs. Hall, and Willie Stevens to the scene of the murders. Geist was then paid \$5,000 to keep quiet about what she knew. Both Geist and the chauffeur denied the story, but newspapers picked it up. They weren't the only ones.

New Jersey governor A. Harry Moore appointed Special Prosecutor Alexander Simpson to reopen and review the case. Simpson was a state senator from Hudson County. On July 28, 1926, Frances Hall, Willie Stevens, Henry Stevens, and cousin Henry de la Bruyere Carpenter were arrested and charged with murder. Carpenter successfully petitioned to be tried separately. Much of the evidence that had been collected in the case in 1922 was missing, but a grand jury decided nonetheless to indict the four. The accused all pleaded not guilty. A new autopsy performed on Eleanor Mills revealed that her killer had cut out her tongue and larynx.

During a preliminary hearing in Somerville, Jane Gibson testified that at about 9 PM on the night of September 14, 1922, she heard a wagon traveling on the road near her farm. She thought that it might be thieves who had been stealing her corn, so she saddled her mule and set off in pursuit. Once she reached De Russey's Lane, in the glare of a car's headlights she saw two figures that she identified as Frances Hall and Willie Stevens. As she got closer to the scene, she saw that there were four people. One held a flashlight, which allowed her to see another person's face. At first she identified the person as Henry Carpenter, then as being Henry Stevens.

Gibson testified that she suddenly heard a shot and then three more. That's when she fled on her mule as she heard a woman say, "Oh, Henry!"

She said she returned to the scene about three hours later to try to find her missing moccasin. That, she said, is when she saw Frances Hall weeping by her husband's side.

## TRIAL

Jane Gibson became the state's main witness against Hall, her two brothers, and her cousin when the trial opened on November 3, 1926, before Judges Charles Parker and Frank Cleary. However, testimony revealed that Gibson wasn't able to pick out the suspects when she first saw them. Neighbor George Sipel also said that Gibson had tried to bribe him with cash to support her testimony. Gibson arrived in court on a stretcher pleading ill health, but her testimony was interrupted when her own mother rose from the gallery and shouted that her daughter was a liar.

The prosecutor's evidence also included a fingerprint from William Stevens that was apparently found on the business card that had been left by Reverend Hall's heel. He also told the court that Mrs. Hall had dyed a coat black after the murders. During the trial Charlotte Mills identified her mother's love letters. Witness Ralph Gosline testified that he had seen Henry Stevens near the scene of the murder on September 14, 1922. Former state trooper Henry Dickman claimed that Henry Carpender paid him \$2,500 to drop the case. Under cross-examination it turned out that Dickman had been recently incarcerated at Alcatraz as a military deserter. That tainted his credibility as a witness.

Defense witnesses supported the alibi that Henry Stevens offered. Frances Hall and William Stevens took the stand in their own defense and denied any involvement in the murder. Jurors listened to 157 witnesses. Then they deliberated for five hours on December 3, 1926, before acquitting all three defendants. Henry Carpender was never tried. De Russey's Lane was subsequently renamed Franklin Boulevard. The crabapple tree under which the bodies had been found is no longer there. In fact, souvenir hunters cut it to pieces—roots and all—the first weekend after the unsolved double murder.

The double murder of Edward Hall and Eleanor Mills is marked not only by the mystery surrounding their slayings. It was also one of the first times that a murder was reported upon by the media using modern methods of transmitting information. Some 300 reporters crammed into the courtroom. Western Union's biggest portable electric switchboard could transmit 20,000 words an hour. The 200 reporters who

covered the trial made good use of this new technology. They were accompanied by 50 photographers. At the end of 11 days, a total of 5 million words had been telegraphed from Somerville. At the end of 18 days, the total had nearly doubled to 9 million words. By the end of 24 days, it was 12 million words. This would be enough words to fill nearly 100 copies of *Cold Cases*.

## FURTHER READING

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Visitors traipsed around the crime scene of Taylor's murder, contaminating the evidence. Photofest.

# Hollywood Murder: The Case of William Desmond Taylor (1922)

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*The police investigation into the murder of Hollywood director William Desmond Taylor was plagued by corruption, a contaminated crime scene and a list of suspects as long as a film's cast of characters. These factors may have made this case more difficult to solve.*

William Desmond Taylor was sitting at his desk preparing his income tax returns for the year 1921. He had just finished editing *The Green Temptation*, a Paris melodrama starring Betty Compson and Theodore Kosloff. His partially finished statement showed that he had earned \$37,000 that year. His valet, Henry Peavey, entered the living room to tell him that supper was served. Taylor got up from his desk and went to the table to eat.

Taylor was a successful film actor and director. After appearing in several silent films, he had made his directorial debut in 1914 with *The Awakening*. He directed more than 40 films over the next seven years, including *Davy Crockett*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Green Temptation*, and *Anne of the Green Gables*. He worked with such acting greats as Mary Pickford, Dustin Farnum, Wallace Reid, and Mary Miles Minter. He was also president of the Motion Picture Directors Association.

Taylor lived in a white bungalow duplex in the exclusive Alvarado Court Apartments on South Alvarado Street in Los Angeles. This housing complex had 16 apartments arranged in eight two-story white stucco buildings overlooking Westlake Park. The bungalows were built side by side with their front doors facing a walkway or driveway rather than the street. Most of Taylor's neighbors were colleagues who also worked in the film industry. Charlie Chaplin's leading lady at the time, Edna Purviance, lived in the building immediately to the west of Taylor. Director Charles Maigne lived in the adjoining bungalow at 404A. On his other side, separated by an eight-foot parkway, lived film comedian Douglas MacLean and his wife Faith.

Taylor's five-room apartment was furnished with exquisite taste. It had an upright piano in one corner of the living room and a small desk directly in front of the door. The bookcases were filled with many books. Expensive bric-a-brac was visible in prominent places throughout the house. Taylor was a cultured, dignified man who was well liked by his peers. The living room wall was a solid border of autographed and framed photos. A picture of Mary Pickford bore the inscription, "To my nice director, William Desmond Taylor, the most patient man

I have ever known. Mary Pickford.” On the piano was another photo inscribed, “For William Desmond Taylor—artist, gentleman, man. Sincere good wishes, Mary Miles Minter, 1920.” There were also several framed photos of actress Mabel Normand.

The popular director sat down to eat what would be his last supper on February 1, 1922. Once the meal was finished, Taylor rose from the table and went to make a telephone call to one of his closest friends, Spanish romantic movie star Antonio Moreno. Peavey the valet busied himself tidying up the dishes. At 6:45 PM, the chauffeur of glamorous silent film star Mabel Normand pulled up to Taylor’s bungalow.

### VISIT FROM A FRIEND

Normand had spent the afternoon with her chauffeur William Davis in the shopping district of Los Angeles. At 6 PM she went to the Hellman Bank at the corner of 6th and Main Streets to place some valuable Christmas gifts in her safety deposit box. Then she phoned home, where her maid said that Taylor had been trying to reach her all afternoon. He said that he had a good book for her that he wanted her to stop in and pick up.

On her way to Taylor’s home, she stopped at Seventh and Broadway Streets to buy some peanuts and a number of magazines, including a copy of the *Police Gazette*. She needed to have new photos taken for the movie studio, and she was inspired by the pose of the young woman on the cover. She ate peanuts in the backseat of her car and tossed the shells on the floor. As she emerged from the vehicle to walk up to Taylor’s door, she told her chauffeur to clean up the car. Peavey answered the door and told her that Taylor was on the phone. Not wanting to interrupt her friend, Normand waited outside on the front step.

When Taylor finished his phone call, Normand stepped inside and visited with the director for about 35 minutes. Peavey mixed them Orange Blossom cocktails (gin and orange juice), which they enjoyed as they sat on the davenport in the living room chatting. Having finished work for the day, Peavey left the house at about 7:30 PM and stopped to visit outside with Normand’s chauffeur before heading home for the night. Taylor gave Normand the book that he had set aside for her. The two emerged from the bungalow at about 7:45 PM, soon after Peavey’s departure. Taylor escorted Normand to her car. She would be the last person to see him alive.



At about 7:55 PM, Taylor's chauffeur Howard Fellows tried to phone Taylor. There was no answer. Fellows was driving Taylor's car and had been told to call him that evening. He went to Taylor's bungalow and rang the doorbell at 8:15 PM to return the car keys as instructed. The lights were on in the house, but there was no answer. He put Taylor's McFarlan vehicle away and went home. Edna Purviance returned home at about midnight and noticed a light on in Taylor's bungalow, but she decided not to disturb her neighbor.

## SCENE OF THE CRIME

Henry Peavey arrived at the Taylor residence the next morning, February 2, 1922, at 7:30 AM to start work. Oddly, the bedroom was dark and only the downstairs light was on. His first task was to make breakfast. He had stopped by a drugstore on his way to work to buy a bottle of Milk of Magnesia for Taylor. At Taylor's house, he picked up the newspaper that was resting on the front doorstep, inserted the key in the lock, pushed open the door, and let out a piercing shriek.

The furniture in the house was in the same place as it had been when he left the night before. Two empty cocktail glasses stood on the table. But Taylor's body lay stretched out on the living room floor near his writing desk. He was lying on his back with his feet toward the door and a chair was resting over one of his legs. He was fully dressed in a vest, coat, collar, and tie. His clothes weren't rumpled and his arms lay straight at his sides. A checkbook was open on the desk in the living room, a pen resting nearby.

Frightened by the discovery of his employer's body, Peavey ran back outside screaming that Taylor was dead. Bungalow owner E. C. Jeessurum emerged from his home dressed in a housecoat. He was the first person to enter his tenant's house, followed by Charles Maigne and Douglas MacLean. Within moments, tenants of nearby bungalows began swarming into the apartment and milling around the body.

Detective-Lieutenant Tom Ziegler was the first police officer to arrive on the scene just before 8 AM. He was careful not to touch the body, and he ordered everyone to leave the house. Without moving the body, a doctor in the crowd stepped forward and conducted a cursory examination. He concluded that Taylor had died of natural causes, possibly heart trouble or a stomach hemorrhage.

Charles Eyton, general manager of Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, a subsidiary of Paramount Pictures, arrived while Ziegler waited

for the coroner. He immediately went upstairs to Taylor's bedroom and collected some of the victim's letters and personal belongings. Ziegler did not stop him. He knew Eyton personally and understood that the studio executive had been a friend of Taylor's. Eyton subsequently destroyed the letters. When later asked why, he said that they were love letters from married women, and he was trying to protect Taylor's name from being dragged into a scandal.

When Eyton came back downstairs, he walked over to where the body lay and began talking to Ziegler. He didn't believe that Taylor had died of natural causes. Deputy coroner William Macdonald arrived at about 8:30 AM. He slid his hand under Taylor's body. When he pulled it out, he found blood. He and Eyton turned over the body and discovered that Taylor had been lying in a pool of blood. Eyton opened Taylor's vest and noticed a hole on the left side. He and Macdonald pulled up the shirt and vest and found the wound. Ziegler phoned the homicide squad immediately. Clearly, Taylor's death was no accident.

## POLICE INVESTIGATION

Investigators H. H. Cline, Ray Cato, Wiley Murphy, "Billy" Cahill, and Jesse A. Winn arrived and discovered that Taylor had been shot at close range with a .38-caliber revolver, likely a Smith & Wesson. The bullet was unusual; it was old and the design was no longer used, but it had entered through Taylor's left side and traveled upward until it lodged in the right side of his neck just under the skin. There was also something odd about the crime scene. The body appeared to have been neatly posed, and the clothes were not ruffled. The bullet holes in Taylor's coat and vest did not match up with one another. When Taylor's arms were at his sides, as he was found, the hole in the coat was significantly lower than the one in the vest. The two holes only matched up when the left elbow was raised. Someone had rearranged the body post mortem. Police initially believed that Taylor had been held up and his hands were raised in the air at the time that he was shot.

Taylor had gone to Europe during the summer of 1921, leaving his home in the care of Edward F. Sands, his cook and valet. When he returned, he discovered that Sands had left a week earlier, around July 15, 1921. Taylor told police that Sands had stolen more than \$2,400 by forging checks and taking jewelry, clothing, and a car. Police later discovered that Sands had used multiple aliases over the years and had left a trail of embezzlement, forgery, and desertion charges in his wake.

Nearly five months later, on December 4, 1921, Sands burglarized Taylor's apartment. The back door was smashed in, and his home was ransacked. Sands stole jewelry and special cigarettes, and a man later identified as Sands pawned some of Taylor's stolen jewelry for \$20 at the Capitol Jewelry and Loan Company in Fresno, California, on December 12, 1921. More jewelry was pawned on December 24, 1921, for \$10 at the Zemanskys Loan and Jewelry Company in Sacramento. Experts later declared that the handwriting on the pawn tickets matched that of Sands.

## SEARCH FOR A KILLER

However, the theory that Taylor was killed during another holdup two months after Sands ransacked his apartment quickly failed to add up. Police found \$78 in cash in Taylor's pocket, a two-carat diamond ring on his finger, and a platinum watch on his body. The watch had stopped at 7:21. A jeweler ruled three weeks later that the watch had stopped when it wound down—not because of Taylor's fall. Robbery was eliminated as a motive.

Taylor's prominence in Hollywood merely heightened public interest in his murder. Following the end of World War I, the public was in a mood to find entertainment amid the hundreds of films that were released each year in the 1920s. In 1921 alone, there were more than 600 movies released in the United States. Popular fan magazines focused on film stars, sharing false or overblown gossip, and reporters pounced on the story of Taylor's murder. The Hollywood setting helped boost interest in the case as well as circulation numbers among newspapers. After Taylor's body was found, the courtyard began filling up with reporters from Los Angeles daily newspapers, out-of-town newspapers, wire services, and photographers.

Police fixed Taylor's time of death as being between 7:40 PM and 8:15 PM. They found a small pile of cigarette stubs at the back of his bungalow, suggesting that someone had waited there for an opportunity to get inside Taylor's apartment. Perhaps the intruder entered when Taylor stepped outside to escort Normand to her car. But who was it?

Sometime between 8 PM and 8:15 PM the night of the murder, Faith MacLean, wife of actor Douglas MacLean, had heard a gunshot from next door after supper. She and her husband lived in the bungalow beside Taylor's. She walked to the door of her home, and in the light coming from Taylor's bungalow, she saw someone emerge from

his house. The person was wearing a heavy coat of the mackinaw type, a cap, and a muffler around their neck. It was a “funny looking” man, she later said. The person she saw paused on Taylor’s porch and looked back towards the half-opened door as though someone inside had said something. Then the person calmly closed the door of Taylor’s apartment and faced Mrs. MacLean as he came down the steps and walked leisurely towards the street. MacLean then assumed that what she had heard was the sound of a passing vehicle backfire—not a gunshot.

Stories of Taylor’s murder and possible leads—both real and imagined—were splashed all over the newspapers. In some reports, a streetcar conductor claimed to have seen a man who fit the description that Mrs. MacLean had given. According to that particular story, the man was seen boarding a car on Maryland Street at either 7:54 or 8:27 PM the night of the murder. Another man insisted that shortly before the murder, someone stopped him on the street and asked for a fictitious address and then asked where Taylor lived. He gave the man the information that was requested. According to another report, two men at a service station said that a man fitting the description asked them shortly before 6 PM where Taylor lived, and the men told him.

## VICTIM’S TRUE IDENTITY

The identity of the man—whom MacLean later said could have actually been a woman dressed as a man—was not the case’s only mystery. With his murder, Taylor’s true identity was finally unmasked to his friends. William Desmond Taylor was really William Cunningham Deane Tanner. He was born in Carlow, County Carlow, Ireland, 56 miles from Dublin, on April 26, 1872. He came to the United States in 1890.

Eighteen years later, he ran a New York business whose share of the profits amounted to a cool \$25,000 a year—a considerable amount of money at the time. He had married Ethel May Harrison in 1901, had a young daughter named Ethel Daisy, and enjoyed a successful business and promising future. One day in the fall of 1908, Taylor went to New York after attending the Vanderbilt Cup Race, took \$500 from his business, and disappeared. The next few years of his life remain shrouded in mystery until he appeared in Hollywood as William Desmond Taylor and quickly climbed the ladder to become a respected director.

Taylor's wife learned about her husband's new identity when she and her daughter attended a film in which Taylor's image was flashed across the screen. His daughter apparently found his address and wrote to him. They exchanged letters and he saw her on his return from a trip to Europe in the summer of 1921. By then, his wife had divorced him and remarried.

## CAST OF SUSPECTS

The investigation into Taylor's murder was headed by district attorney Thomas Lee Woolwine. He believed that the motive for the murder was either retaliation or revenge. On the morning of February 3, 1922, he handed to special investigator Ed C. King an anonymous letter written in a woman's handwriting. The author of the letter claimed that if they searched the basement in Mabel Normand's apartment carefully, they would find the murder weapon, a .38-caliber pearl-handled revolver. King, Lieutenants Winn, Murphy, and Cline searched the apartment thoroughly, from the cellar to the attic. They found two .25-caliber revolvers in the dresser drawer of Normand's bedroom, but neither had any connection with the murder and no other gun was found.

Six days after Taylor's murder, district attorney Woolwine issued an arrest warrant for Sands on charges of theft and grand larceny. He was described as being about 26 years old, five feet seven inches, light complexion, heavy build, straight brown hair, and a cigarette smoker. Police called for Sands to step forward and clear his name, but he was never found.

By March 6, 1922, a month after the murder, more than 300 people had claimed to have killed Taylor, including one confession from someone in Paris and another from a person in England, but detectives were no closer to solving Taylor's murder. Mabel Normand was interviewed by police, but she was quickly discounted as a possible suspect. Who else could want him dead? Police continued searching Taylor's house for clues. While opening a book in his library, a letter fell out. The crest bore the initials M. M. M., and the letter read, "Dearest, I love you. I love you. I love you," followed by several cross marks and one big cross mark. It was signed, "Yours always, Mary," and was from Mary Miles Minter.

Fuelled by her mother's ambition, Minter had begun acting when she was barely five years old. Theater led to films, and in 1918 her mother and manager Charlotte Shelby negotiated a deal with film

studio Paramount to pay Minter \$1.3 million for 20 films over five years. In April 1923, Minter would turn 21 and no longer be under her mother's legal control. The young actress, who was two months shy of her twentieth birthday, had been deeply in love with the 49-year-old Taylor and was a frequent visitor to his apartment. Actor Carl Stockdale phoned Charlotte Shelby to tell her that Taylor was dead. At about 11 AM on February 2, 1922, Shelby went to Minter's room. Minter was getting dressed and fixing her hair when Shelby pounded on the door and announced the news. Minter was devastated.

A handkerchief belonging to Minter was found in Taylor's apartment after his death. Detectives also collected three long, blond hairs from under the collar of his coat. An expert compared them with combings retrieved from Minter's dressing room and noted that they matched. These hairs were placed in an envelope and left with the property clerk at the Central Police Station for safekeeping.

The district attorney questioned Minter, but she contributed no new information to the investigation. Detectives went to see Charlotte Shelby at her home to find out what she knew about Taylor and the murder. Shelby arrived at the door fastening her dress and announced that she was getting ready to take the 6 PM train to New York. She told the detectives that she had no time to speak to them about an investigation about which she had no information to add. She directed them to address questions to her lawyers, Mr. Mott and Mr. Cassill, who were in her house for that reason. Special investigator King learned from Shelby's mother, Julia Miles, that Shelby had spent the day of the murder shopping, the early evening visiting friends, and returned home at about 9 PM.

Theories were also put forward that Taylor's death was related to a drug ring. He wasn't an addict, but some of his friends, including several women, were known to be addicted. Tom Green, assistant U.S. Attorney in charge of drug prosecutions, stated that Taylor had appealed to him for help to get rid of the dope ring that was supplying drugs to a certain actress. At that time, according to Taylor, this actress was paying about \$2,000 a week for drugs. Harry Young, who used the alias Harry Lee, was in Los Angeles at the time of the Taylor murder. When he was arrested, Young was in possession of cocaine, opium, drug paraphernalia, and a .38-caliber pistol. Police questioned Young, but he denied killing Taylor and he was released after three days.

District Attorney Woolwine was a close personal friend of both Minter and Shelby. While King was trying to interview Shelby, District

Attorney Woolwine ordered that evidence in the case be transferred from the police station to his office and placed in a cabinet. This evidence later disappeared. Everything except Taylor's coat and vest were later taken to Woolwine's home. Woolwine passed away in 1923 and was succeeded by Asa Keyes.

## MINTER DRAMA

Drama surrounding the case continued to unfold. In August 1923, less than four months after reaching the age of majority, Mary Miles Minter announced plans to bring court action against her mother. She wanted to try to take possession of the fortune that she had made while working in films. She said that she had earned more than \$1 million, and her mother handled all of her money. She told reporters, "I have been the wage earner, the family meal ticket ever since I was five years old. I wasn't given a chance to get more than three or four years of actual schooling. Mother was ambitious socially and financially, and I had to turn beauty and talents into cash."

Minter claimed that her last contract had called for her to be paid \$1.3 million. When her mother showed her the figures, \$175,000 was credited to Shelby and \$165,000 to Minter. Household expenses, for Shelby and daughters Margaret and Mary, had been deducted from Minter's share. For her part, Shelby claimed that Minter wasn't able to manage her own finances. Minter told the media that she had hoped she and Taylor would eventually marry, and she said that she was told not to talk about it when Taylor died because it would hurt her career. Soon after the revelation, Shelby agreed to compromise with her daughter on financial matters, and the issue disappeared from the pages of newspapers.

The investigation into Taylor's murder continued to limp along under the direction of Asa Keyes. Written statements from several people associated with Minter's family were not taken in the months following Taylor's murder, despite the fact that Shelby had openly threatened to kill Taylor. Shelby was jealous of any attention that men paid to her daughter, and she had threatened to kill others, including actor Monte Blue and actor/director James Kirkwood. She had repeatedly threatened to murder Taylor if he continued paying attention to Minter. Minter was a highly paid actress, and Shelby needed to maintain control of her daughter and her daughter's earnings.

Charlotte Whitney, Shelby's secretary, made a statement to Keyes on November 25, 1925, and then again to his successor in 1937. She said that she was present when Shelby threatened to kill Taylor. Shelby phoned Whitney and chauffeur Chauncey Eaton at about midnight one night when she was looking for Minter. They drove to Taylor's home. Shelby hid a loaded revolver in the sleeve of her coat, entered Taylor's home to search the apartment, but her daughter wasn't there. Shelby angrily told Taylor she would have killed him had she found Minter in his apartment.

According to Whitney, the day before Taylor was found murdered Minter said that she and Taylor had a date to drive to Santa Ana. Shelby overheard the conversation and locked Minter in her room to prevent her from going. Shelby was also said to own a .38-caliber revolver believed to have been a Smith & Wesson. Keyes took the first written statement from Shelby on April 9, 1926, in the presence of her lawyer John G. Mott. She claimed that on the night of Taylor's murder, she had spent two hours at home from 7 PM to 9 PM having milk and sandwiches with friend and actor Carl Stockdale.

Buron Fitts, who succeeded Keyes, continued to investigate. He interviewed Shelby's chauffeur, Chauncey Eaton, on November 25, 1929. Eaton said that Shelby phoned him the morning that Taylor's body was found. She announced that Taylor had been murdered and wanted him to come to work right away. He didn't have time to finish his breakfast. Shelby's friend Miss J. M. Berger had already told police that Shelby called her at 7 PM on February 1, 1922, and asked if she knew where Minter was. Berger said that she did not, and Shelby hung up. The next morning, Shelby told Berger and Eaton at or just before 7:30 AM that Taylor had been murdered, but his body wasn't discovered until 7:30 AM and the fact that he had been murdered wasn't confirmed until 8 AM.

In the coming years, interest in Taylor's unsolved murder would occasionally be revived before it dissipated again. During an exclusive interview with the *San Francisco Call-Bulletin* on December 21, 1929, California's ex-Governor Friend W. Richardson claimed that he knew who killed Taylor. He said that a Folsom prisoner had told him a film actress killed Taylor. When asked why he had waited to speak up, Richardson explained that he went to the foreman of the grand jury in 1926 to ask about presenting the information. He claimed that he was told that either Keyes or one of his deputy district attorneys would block the testimony.



Further investigation revealed that the prisoner to whom Richardson was referring was named Otis Hefner, who claimed that he was involved with a drug gang, one of whose members was Edward Sands. He alleged that Sands delivered drugs to Taylor, who was distributing it to others in the film industry, including the actress who allegedly killed him. Sands and Taylor had a falling out, he claimed. The night of the murder the two men went to Taylor's home to deliver some drugs and saw an actress rushing out. A special investigator discovered that the story was a ploy that Hefner concocted to get Richardson to pardon him and have him released—which he did.

### INVESTIGATION REVIVED

The case lay dormant again until 1937. In a statement made on May 5, 1937, Minter's older sister Margaret Fillmore said that in her previous statements in 1926 she had tried to cover up for her mother about Taylor's murder. She said that on the night of February 1, 1922, Shelby had locked Minter in her room because she was afraid her daughter would run away with Taylor.

Fillmore said that her mother gave conflicting stories of her whereabouts the night of the Taylor murder. Shelby told her family that on the night of February 1, she took a taxi at about 6 PM and went to the Swedish Eucalyptus Bath House north of Hollywood Boulevard, but the doctor who ran the bathhouse had no record of Shelby being there that night. The following morning, Carl Stockdale phoned Shelby and told her that Taylor had been murdered, shot with a bullet fired from a .38-caliber Smith & Wesson revolver, the same type of gun Shelby owned. Soon after, she asked her chauffeur Chauncey Eaton to remove the loaded cartridges and destroy all of them. Instead, he hid a cartridge on a beam in the basement of her home, which is where investigators found it on May 23, 1937. It was the same type and weight as the bullet that had killed Taylor. Fillmore said her grandmother, Julia Miles, disposed of the gun by throwing it in a bayou near her Louisiana plantation in August 1922.

In the meantime, Shelby had appeared before the Los Angeles County grand jury on May 6, 1937, proclaiming her innocence. Carl Stockdale testified in support of her alibi, which was accepted. District Attorney Buron Fitts officially closed the investigation into the Taylor murder on September 29, 1938. It would be reopened if any new evidence were

uncovered, but in a case that appeared to be plagued by corruption and poor management of the crime scene, none ever was.

An estimated 10,000 people lined the streets of Hollywood for Taylor's funeral on February 7, 1922, at St. Paul's Pro-Cathedral. He was buried in a crypt in Hollywood Memorial Park Cemetery, perhaps the only other person besides his killer to know what really happened on February 1, 1922. Mabel Normand died of tuberculosis in the Pottenger Sanitorium at Monrovia, California, on February 23, 1930. Mary Miles Minter died in 1984. Most of the films that Taylor left behind have been lost.

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**The Wrong Man:  
The Murder of Father  
Hubert Dahme (1924)**

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*The investigation into the murder of Father Hubert Dahme illustrates how circumstantial evidence nearly convicted the wrong man. That is, until the district attorney methodically dismantled what first appeared to be an airtight case.*

Father Hubert Dahme put on his coat and stepped outside for his usual evening walk in downtown Bridgeport, Connecticut. The popular Catholic priest had been a pastor for 30 years, the last 20 of which were spent at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church. When he reached the intersection of High Street and Main Street at about 7:45 PM, electric streetlights lit the way on the cold winter night of February 4, 1924.

Suddenly, a man approached Father Dahme from behind and raised his right hand. With the muzzle close to the priest's head, he fired a shot. The shooter then turned and ran in a westerly direction along High Street, up a hill, and disappeared. Dahme fell to the ground. He had been shot through the left ear with a .32-caliber revolver. He was rushed to St. Vincent's Hospital, where he died an hour later, while priests and nuns knelt reciting the Litany for the Dying in the corridor outside his ward. He never regained consciousness.

The murder generated public interest because of Dahme's prominence, the brutality of the crime, and the public place in which the murder was carried out. A reward was offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the murderer. Police felt pressure to find, arrest, and convict the killer, but they couldn't obtain accurate information about exactly what had happened.

Witnesses disagreed about the sequence of events. Some said that a person matching the killer's description had been seen walking with Dahme on several occasions 7 to 10 days before the shooting. Other witnesses said they saw two men fleeing the scene of the murder in a southerly direction along Main Street. Three witnesses walking together on High Street saw a man running away just after the shot went off. One young woman said that she heard the fatal gunshot as she drove by the spot where the murder occurred. After parking the vehicle, she ran back to see what had happened. She was nearly knocked over along the way by two men running in the opposite direction. The timing was such that it was possible they were fleeing the scene of the crime. Witnesses also varied in their descriptions of the killer, but they agreed that he was of medium build, relatively young, and wore a gray cap and a dark, three-quarter length overcoat with a velvet collar.

## FORCED CONFESSION

Eight days later, on the night of February 11, Harold Israel was walking down the street in Norwalk, Connecticut. He was from Bridgeport and was on his way to Pennsylvania to visit his father. He had arrived in town that day but had neither money nor a place to sleep. A police officer thought he was acting in an unusual manner. He picked up Israel and brought him to the police station. During a search, he found a .32-caliber revolver on him—the same type of weapon that had been used to kill Father Dahme. Four chambers were loaded and one was empty.

Israel was asked if he knew anything about the murder of Father Dahme. He said that he had heard about it and that two of his buddies were near the scene when it happened. He was convicted for carrying a concealed weapon and sent to the county jail in Bridgeport on February 12. After he arrived there, he was taken to the police station for questioning. His interrogation began at noon on February 13, 1924, and finally ended more than 24 hours later on February 14 at about 4 P.M. Although police did not physically assault Israel to try to obtain a confession, he was subjected to prolonged and intense questioning for hours at a time.

Israel kept insisting to police that he was innocent and that he was in a movie theater at the time of the killing. He had been living on Stratford Avenue and sharing a room with his friends Charles Clint and Nick Cardullo. They had met while they were stationed in Panama with the U.S. Army. The room was located above the Philadelphia Lunch restaurant. After 28 hours of police questioning, Israel, out of despair, finally confessed to killing Dahme.

Once police had obtained a confession, they set about building a case. They asked Israel where they could find the cartridge for the bullet that had killed Dahme. He told them that it was in the bathroom of his rooming house. Police investigated and found one there. They assumed that it was from the gun that had fired the fatal shot. Then they took Israel in a car along the presumed course of the shooter's escape route. According to officers, he pointed out where he saw the man and two women on High Street, and the corner where he stumbled. Witnesses were brought to the station, where they identified Israel as the man they had seen running from the scene of the crime. Police believed that they now had their killer. Israel was arraigned in the City Court of Bridgeport on the morning of February 15 on a charge of first-degree murder.

Police then contacted Charles J. Van Armburgh, who had once worked with the Remington Arms Company and was familiar with firearms and the manufacturing of various weapons. He was a former instructor in marksmanship and ordinance work who was now working with the police department in Boston. He examined Israel's revolver and the bullet that had killed Dahme. He concluded that Israel's revolver had fired the bullet that had killed Dahme.

## CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

Then waitress Nellie Trafton stepped forward. She worked at the Star Restaurant in Bridgeport on the northwest corner of Main and Arch Streets, a block from the murder scene. Trafton had met Israel and his two roommates when she worked at Philadelphia Lunch, downstairs from where they lived. A customer at the Star Restaurant overheard her saying that she knew Israel and believed he was guilty. She claimed that he had once shown her a revolver and said he would kill someone with it. She said that she had seen him walk past the restaurant about 5 or 10 minutes before the murder.

The coroner investigating the case examined eyewitness statements, ballistics, and the confession. He issued a 10-point report on February 25, 1924, outlining the evidence against Israel. He concluded that the police had found Dahme's killer. His evidence included statements by Trafton and eight witnesses, statements that the killer wore a gray cap and brown overcoat, eyewitness identification of Israel at police headquarters, the signed confession, the fact that Israel went over the killer's flight route with police, the accused's statement that indicated where the empty shell could be found, and the match between the fatal bullet and Israel's gun.

After the coroner had issued his report, the presumably airtight case was referred to the Fairfield County State's attorney's office. Attorney Homer Cummings believed that Israel was probably guilty, but he also knew that the conclusion was arrived at through a combination of circumstantial evidence. He decided to investigate the evidence himself just to be certain. As Cummings later explained to the *New York Times*, "It is just as important for a state's attorney to use the great powers of his office to protect the innocent as it is to convict the guilty."

Cummings interviewed key witnesses and the accused, studied the ballistics report, and had doctors examine Israel. The physicians concluded that Israel was in a state of high anxiety and was physically and mentally exhausted at the time of his confession. Therefore, he was in

no condition to make a reliable statement to police. On February 18, after he had had a chance to rest, Israel retracted his confession. He told doctors and Cummings that he had confessed because he was so tired that he would admit to anything to get an opportunity to rest. Plus, evidence was being stacked against him.

Doctors said that Israel was of low intelligence, docile, and not prone to violence. He also had a weak will and was prone to the suggestion of others. Cummings pointed out that Israel's inconsistent statements about his involvement with the Dahme murder should have been a red flag to investigators: first he denied guilt, then he confessed, and then he finally recanted.

### EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

The state's attorney also wanted to test the validity of the eyewitness testimony that had been given to police. He and an assistant went out onto the street at about 8 PM one evening to reenact the crime. The streetlight nearest where Dahme was gunned down was 50 yards away. While his assistant stood where the priest was shot, Cummings placed himself at the same distance from which witnesses claimed to have seen the murderer fleeing the scene. Given the little amount of light available, Cummings was unable to see the features of someone whom he knew well. He concluded that witnesses would not have been able to see the murderer's features clearly from where they were standing.

Next, they went to the Star Restaurant to talk to waitress Nellie Trafton about what she saw the night of the murder. She told them that she went to use the cash register at the front of the restaurant at about 7:35 PM, about 10 minutes before the murder. She glanced out the window and saw Israel walk by at a leisurely pace. He waved and she waved back.

Cummings stood where Trafton said she had been standing when Israel walked by. The front of the restaurant had two windows with a brightly lit space in between to display fruits and other items for sale. The exterior window had lettering on it. The prosecutor discovered that distortion caused by the double windows made it difficult to clearly see the features of anyone standing on the sidewalk or walking by. His assistant tried as well and came to the same realization. When Cummings learned that Trafton had applied for the reward that was offered for information leading to an arrest in connection with the murder, he concluded that she had a motive to be less than truthful about having seen Israel before Dahme was shot.



## BALLISTICS EVIDENCE

Having discredited the confession and eyewitnesses, Cummings set his sights on the ballistics evidence in the case. He learned that Israel's landlady had found another shell in the same bathroom where police had earlier located the one that was admitted into evidence. It appeared that her tenants practiced target shooting in the woods and would drop shells carelessly, sometimes in their bathroom.

Cummings consulted six ballistics experts about the match that Van Amburgh said he had made between the fatal bullet and Israel's revolver. Van Amburgh rested his claim largely on similarities between photos of the crucial bullet and photos of the bullets that he had test fired from the gun of the accused. Cummings noticed that the images did not line up exactly when placed on top of each other. The six ballistics experts agreed. They concluded that, in fact, it disproved Van Amburgh's conclusion because the grooves of the two bullets didn't match. The fatal bullet had indentations that the bullet from Israel's gun did not. There was no smoking gun.

If Israel wasn't at the corner of Main and High Streets at 7:45 PM when the murder occurred on February 4, 1924, where was he? Israel told police that he had gone to the Empire Theater at 7 PM to see a movie and emerged at about 9 PM. He said that he saw four films: *The Fighting Skipper*, *The Mystery Girl*, *The Leather Pushers*, and the *Ghost of the Dungeon*. Cummings asked Israel what film was being shown when he entered the theater. *The Leather Pushers*, he replied. He went on to explain that he saw the last part of it and stayed in the theater until it was shown again. The manager of the theater corroborated the order in which the films were shown and at what time. Israel's alibi held up. If he was in the theater, then clearly he could not have been at the scene of the murder.

## CASE ON TRIAL

The case went to court on May 28, 1924. Cummings spoke for 90 minutes, methodically discrediting every piece of evidence the police had brought against Israel. He also pointed out that Israel's cap wasn't grey—it was more of a greenish-olive color. The state was dropping the charges, he announced. When he was finished speaking, the courtroom audience sat in stunned silence. Then they stood and applauded. Harold Israel burst into tears. He was a free man.

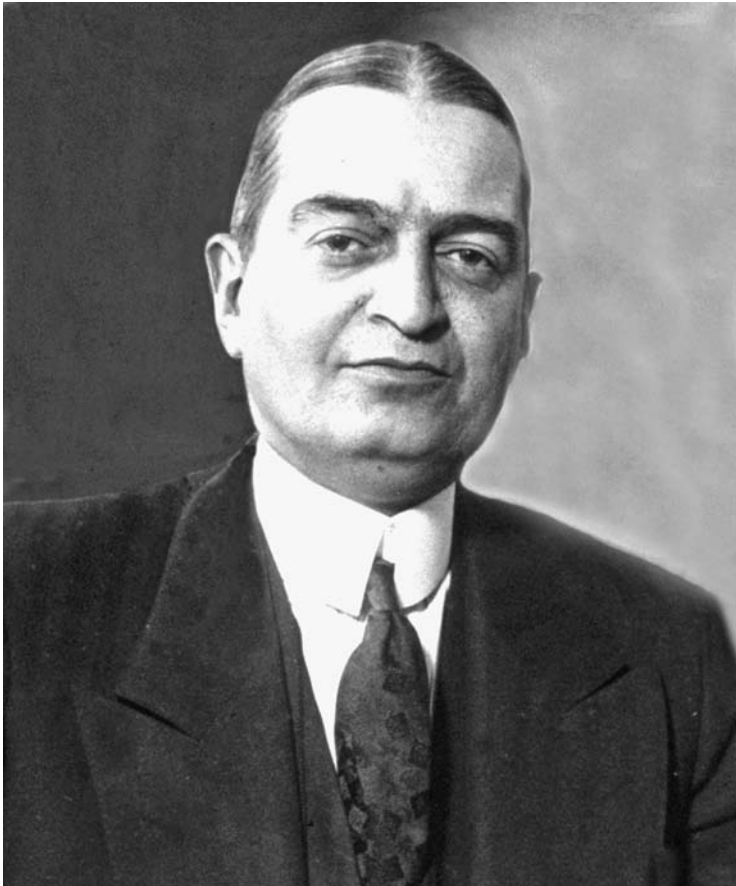
Cummings determined that mistaken eyewitness accounts had led to Israel's imprisonment in the first place. He shone a light on the fact that eyewitness testimony is not as accurate as one may be led to believe. In an interview with the *New York Times* in 1935, he gave an example. "Assume that after a light fall of snow in the early hours of the morning an animal passes over the ground near a house," he said. "Hours later an expert can tell by examining the footprints whether the animal was a rabbit, opossum or fox. Assume, on the other hand, that three men standing at a distance in the half-light of dawn saw that animal pass. The chances are that not one of them would agree as to the breed of animal they saw. The eyewitness testimony would be much less conclusive than that of the expert who never even saw the animal."

This explanation came two years after U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had named Cummings his first attorney general of the United States. The dramatic story of how Harold Israel was saved from the hangman's noose subsequently attracted Hollywood's attention. In 1947 Louis De Rochemont produced a film for Twentieth Century Fox about the murder and Israel's subsequent trial. It starred John Payne and Lee J. Cobb, and the renowned Elia Kazan directed the docu-drama, which gave the characters fictitious names. The film was called *Boomerang* and won an award for best director from the New York Film Critics Circle.

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Joseph Crater left a New York restaurant one evening and was never seen again. Library of Congress.

# **Pull a Crater: The Disappearance of Judge Joseph Force Crater (1930)**

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*The story of Joseph Force Crater's disappearance was shrouded in allegations that it may have been linked to illegal activities by Tammany Hall, a powerful Democratic party political organization of the time. Theories about what really happened to Crater continued to surface long after he was last seen on a New York City sidewalk.*

Joseph Force Crater's work and political connections finally paid off. After graduating cum laude from Pennsylvania's Lafayette College in 1910 and then Columbia Law School in 1913, the Easton, Pennsylvania, native worked as a law clerk. In 1920 he was hired as a law secretary for then State Supreme Court Justice Robert F. Wagner, until his boss became a U.S. senator in 1926. Crater then entered private practice, doing much appellate work for Wagner's firm. From 1917 onwards he also taught law at the City College of New York, Fordham, and New York University.

Crater was a busy man. He also became involved in Democratic Party politics, controlled in New York by the party's political machine of Tammany Hall. He had too many activities to juggle, however, so he stopped teaching at Fordham in 1919 and then at City College to spend more time on politics. His fortunes grew, as did his involvement.

In 1927, he and wife Stella bought a cooperative apartment on New York City's Fifth Avenue. They hired a cook, maid Amedia Christian, and chauffeur Fred Kahler, bought a grand piano, and paid off the \$5,000 mortgage of Crater's parents. By 1929, Crater was president of the Cayuga Democratic Club, the base of support for Tammany district leader Martin Healy. Healy was later investigated for selling judgeships.

In February 1929, Crater was appointed receiver for the bankrupt Libby Hotel. Within four months, Crater sold it to the American Mortgage Loan Company for \$75,000. Six weeks after the sale, the City of New York wanted to seize the land under the Libby to widen the street. The American Mortgage Loan Company sold it to the city for \$2.85 million.

On April 8, 1930, New York governor Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Crater, then 41 years old, to a post on the New York State Supreme Court. Crater's nomination to the highest judicial post in New York County surprised many people, but he was confirmed by the State Senate within two days and sworn into office a week later. The Association of the Bar of the City of New York supported the choice, and Governor Roosevelt won kudos for the appointment.

Senator Wagner was in his law firm's New York City office preparing to leave on his annual European vacation, when New York State supreme court justice Crater visited him on August 1, 1930, to wish him a good trip. Then Crater took his chauffeur-driven Cadillac and went to his lakeside vacation cabin near Belgrade Lakes, Maine, to rejoin his wife. The community was north of Lewiston, near the center of Maine. He and wife, Stella Mance Wheeler Crater, met in 1912 and married on March 16, 1917, when the divorce from her previous marriage became final. The childless couple had bought the country house in 1919. Crater was returning to Maine after spending two weeks in New York City and Atlantic City.

Crater and chauffeur Fred Kahler drove through the night to get to the cabin. They stopped for breakfast at a hotel in Augusta, Maine, before reaching Belgrade Lakes, where Stella was waiting. During the day Crater wrote and mailed a check for \$90 to a woman that he knew in New York. The Craters went motor boating with friends that Saturday, ate dinner out, and went bowling in the evening in the village.

Joseph told Ludwig Traube, a neighbor at his country home, that he planned to stay in Maine for two or three weeks. The Craters had no phone at their cabin, but a message was delivered to them from town that evening. Someone had made a long-distance phone call to the drugstore for him. He went into town and returned the telephone call. When he came back to the cabin, he announced to his wife that he needed to return to New York City the next day. "I've got to straighten out a few people," he said. Stella asked no questions.

## RETURN TO NEW YORK

As Crater left the cabin in Maine on August 3, 1930, he told Stella that he would be back on August 6, or at the very latest in time for her birthday on August 9. His chauffeur dropped him off at the train station in Maine. Upon arriving in New York City, Crater went to his apartment at 40 Fifth Avenue. He talked to his housemaid Amedia Christian and asked her to come back to the apartment on August 7 to tidy up after his departure for Maine. He said that he wouldn't need her again until August 25, the day he was due back in the city for the opening of the Supreme Court term. After speaking with her, he went to his chambers at the courthouse near City Hall.

The day after returning to New York City from his cabin, Crater had lunch at a nearby restaurant and went to see his doctor, Dr. Albert Raggi.

During a visit to Atlantic City in late July, Crater had seriously injured his right index finger when it was slammed in a car door. In the evening, Crater went to see the play *Ladies All* with his friend and fellow lawyer William Klein. He loved the theater.

Afterwards, Crater headed over to Club Abbey. It was owned by Owen “Owney” Madden, a Liverpool native with a violent past, who had been a gang leader in his youth. Madden had killed a man in 1912 and ordered someone else’s death two years later. He received a 20-year sentence for manslaughter but was released about 10 years later. He bankrolled himself during Prohibition as a bootlegger and a club owner. Crater spent time at the club that evening with Elaine Dawn, a singer and dancer who had recently appeared in *Show Boat* and *Artists and Models*. Then he went home.

On August 5, Crater went to Dr. Raggi’s house for dinner and an evening poker game. He was a conservative player, and the game ended sometime between midnight and 1 AM. Crater went home to sleep in his own bed for what would be the last time.

August 6, 1930, promised to be a hot day. It was already 75 degrees Fahrenheit by 8 AM, and the temperature would climb to 90 degrees for the fourth day in a row. Crater only had one minor case on his docket that morning, and then he returned to his chambers. He sorted some papers and destroyed others. He asked his assistant, Joseph Mara, to cash two checks and bring him the money. One was for \$3,000 from his account at Chase National Bank while the other was for \$2,150 from another account at the Empire Trust Company.

After Mara returned from running his errands at the banks, Crater asked him to help bring six portfolios of papers to the apartment belonging to the Craters. The cases were later found in the apartment, but the papers were not. As Crater left his chambers, he told law secretary Fred Johnson that he was going to Westchester for a swim. Once Crater and Mara had dropped off the six cases, Crater dismissed his assistant for the day and reiterated that he was heading to Westchester for a swim. Mara and Johnson both assumed that he was going to the Larchmont Shore Club, of which he was a member. Crater never went to the club that day. In fact, he hadn’t set foot in there since June.

Instead, he had lunch with lawyer Martin Lippman at the Epicure Restaurant on Stone Street, as he did once or twice a week. Over the course of the afternoon, Crater went home and changed out of the suit that he had been wearing. He set it aside to be sent to the cleaners, and then he put on a brown suit with green pinstripes and wide lapels. He phoned

lawyer Reginald Issacs at 5:30 PM to discuss a case. Afterwards, he began making plans for the evening. During a trip to Atlantic City, he had seen a preview of *Dancing Partner*, the latest Belasco production of a comedy by Alexander Engel and Alfred Grunwald. Since the show had just opened in New York on August 6, he went to the Arrow Ticket Agency at 7 PM and asked to buy a ticket. He told a clerk that he was returning to his cabin in Maine the next day. The clerk told Crater that a ticket for seat D-110 would be left for him at the box office.

## DISAPPEARANCE

Crater went into Billy Haas's restaurant on West Forty-Fifth Street at 8 PM. Lawyer William Klein and showgirl Sally Lou Ritz were having dinner there when he arrived. They invited Crater to join them. He sat down with them for a meal of lobster cocktail appetizer, chicken and vegetables, pie, and coffee. Showtime for *Dancing Partner* was at 8:40 PM, but their dinner didn't end until about 9:15 PM. Since he had seen the show before, perhaps Crater wasn't concerned about missing the first part.

Ritz, Klein, and Crater left the restaurant and said their good-byes on the sidewalk. It was the last time that anyone ever saw Crater. Ritz and Klein climbed into a cab and headed off together to Coney Island. Crater was still standing on the curb as they left. It was later said that Crater took a cab down Forty-Fifth Street, but no taxi driver remembered picking him up. Someone collected the ticket that had been left at the theater's box office for him, but the clerk could not remember if it was Crater who picked it up.

The next morning, Amedia Christian went to Crater's Fifth Avenue apartment as planned. She had agreed to tidy up after the judge's departure for Maine. Nothing seemed amiss when the maid arrived. Crater's bed had been slept in, and she assumed that the judge had been there the night before. He had also left a suit and some other clothes for her to bring to a local cleaner. The suit was cleaned, pressed, and returned the same afternoon.

At Crater's chambers, his staff wasn't expecting him either. After all, he had told them that he was returning to Maine to join his wife at their cabin. For her part, Stella wasn't sure exactly when he planned to return. He had told her before going to New York City the previous weekend that he would probably be back in Maine on Wednesday but no later than Saturday. She went to meet the daily train arriving from



New York on Thursday, but he wasn't on it. Unconcerned, she assumed he would be back on Friday or Saturday.

Two days later, it was Stella's birthday and she was beginning to feel annoyed at her husband's absence. A storekeeper in Belgrade Lakes delivered a red canoe that Joe had bought her as a gift. Friends joined her for a birthday party that evening. She wasn't particularly concerned, she later revealed in her book. "Annoyed is a more apt description." By August 11, however, she was beginning to worry. Joe had left for New York City more than a week ago. She went to a friend's home and used their telephone to call Simon Rifkind in New York, who had succeeded Crater as Wagner's law secretary. Rifkind said that he had seen Crater around town but he couldn't remember precisely when. He offered to check if Crater was, in fact, in New York. Stella agreed. By the end of the workweek, however, Rifkind had not contacted the worried wife with any news of her husband's whereabouts.

## LOOKING FOR CRATER

Tired of waiting for news that wasn't forthcoming, Stella instructed chauffeur Kahler to drive to their apartment in New York four days later to see if he could find answers about Joseph's whereabouts. When he arrived, he found a large amount of unopened mail. It was clear that no one had been to the apartment in some time. When questioned, Crater's law secretary Fred Johnson claimed to have seen his boss. Rifkind finally sent Stella a reassuring note about her husband. Kahler did the same a few days later. "It looks as if everything is all right," the chauffeur wrote. "The apartment is OK. I haven't seen Mr. Crater but everybody says he has been around and is all right."

But he wasn't. When Kahler went back to Maine a week later, he admitted to Stella that Crater's associates, including Crater's law secretary, had discouraged him from searching too carefully for Crater. They claimed that it could affect his chances for election to a full, 14-year term on the Supreme Court in the fall. District leader Martin Healy and Tammany Hall were under fire over allegations that they were selling judgeships. Perhaps they did not want anyone to scrutinize Crater's disappearance too closely.

By August 25, it had been nearly three weeks without word from Crater. Stella was sick with worry; she was neither eating nor sleeping properly. Chief Judge Louis Valente phoned her at a public telephone in Maine when Crater didn't show up at the reopening of the Supreme

Court. Now Crater's disappearance was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore, and his friends and acquaintances began to realize that he was truly missing. Instead of going public with news of Crater's disappearance, his associates tried to address the matter privately. Assistant Joseph Mara had been picking up the Crater's mail regularly since Kahler had been to the apartment two weeks earlier. Leo Lowenthal, Senator Wagner's bodyguard, was a former New York City detective. He visited the Crater apartment and talked to Mara. That's when Lowenthal learned about Crater's destruction of documents, but he didn't see any reason to alert police.

The lack of information about her husband's whereabouts began to frustrate Stella Crater. She was tired of sitting on her hands, so she had Kahler drive her back to New York. They arrived at the apartment in the early hours of August 29, and by then Crater had not been seen for more than three weeks. She immediately began phoning anyone that she could think of, looking for information about her husband. At 2:45 AM she called Tammany's Healy and spoke for a few minutes. She also got in touch with Simon Rifkind and New York City mayor Jimmy Walker. She phoned Healy again later in the day.

Stella and Lowenthal searched the apartment, but the only thing missing was the brown pinstripe suit that Crater had been seen wearing at Billy Haas's restaurant the night of his disappearance. Oddly, he had left behind the monogrammed pocket watch, pen, and card case that he loved and usually carried with him. Lowenthal persuaded Stella to return to Maine on August 30. He said that it was best nothing be done about Crater's disappearance until Senator Wagner returned from his European vacation a few days later.

## CASE GOES PUBLIC

Before Wagner had stepped off the boat, the *New York World* published a lengthy article on September 3, 1930, announcing Crater's disappearance publicly for the first time. Rifkind, who was first alerted of Crater's disappearance on August 11, finally reported it to the New York Police Department that day. He also told the *New York Times* in an interview that he believed Crater had been murdered. To help Stella, he deposited Crater's paychecks to the couple's joint bank account and loaned her \$200. Less than two weeks later she borrowed another \$1,000.

While Crater's associates said they believed that he had been murdered, the police thought the destruction of documents and the cherished

items he left behind pointed to his deliberate and planned disappearance. Wagner, whose ship from Europe docked the day after the story hit the headlines, began distancing himself from Crater. He claimed that they were never more than “mere acquaintances” and that he had not actively supported Crater’s nomination to the bench. For his part, Governor Roosevelt claimed that he had not been influenced by anyone to appoint Crater to the New York State Supreme Court.

By September 5, nearly a month after Crater was last seen, stories about his disappearance filled New York newspapers. Headlines included one on the front page of the *New York World*. “Crater Mystery Deepens: No Clue to Whereabouts, Police Making No search,” read one headline. Police began investigating frantically. Suddenly, there were Crater sightings from Rouse’s Point, New York, to Toronto and Montreal, Canada. Detectives followed up on each of the leads, only to discover that they were groundless. Stella stayed in seclusion in Maine but filed an official missing person’s report. Crater sightings continued throughout October 1930, but none led to the judge himself.

The police department issued a poster with the headline “Missing Since August 6, 1930.” Underneath his portrait were the words, “Honorable Joseph Force Crater, Justice of the Supreme Court, State of New York.” Crater was described as being six feet tall, 185 pounds, with mixed grey hair that was originally dark brown, a medium dark complexion, brown eyes, and false teeth. Police searched Crater’s apartment for the second time, but found nothing. The *New York World* offered a reward of \$2,500 for anyone who could establish a reason for Crater’s disappearance. The next day Mayor Walker offered an additional reward of \$5,000.

Within days, more information about Crater’s activities would hit the headlines. Aspiring actress Elaine Dawn told reporters that she had met Crater over the summer after being introduced by lawyer William Klein. She also said that Crater knew several of the women in the *Artists and Models* troupe and they liked him. The next day, the *New York Daily* linked Crater with Sally Lou Ritz, whom he and Klein had dined with on August 6. Cast members Alice Woods and Jane Manners had also met him earlier that summer. Then Marie Miller, nightclub hostess at the Beaux Arts Club in Atlantic City in New Jersey was also added to the list of women linked to Crater.

Crater was also linked to Constance Braemer Marcus, who worked at the Maurice Mendel dress shop on East Fifty-Seventh Street. Marcus had met Crater in 1922 or 1923 when she was working for the Cayuga

Democratic Club. From 1924 until his disappearance, Crater paid the portion of her monthly rent that she could not afford.

## GRAND JURY

Meanwhile, the police investigation plodded on. Walter Lipmann, the editorial page editor of the *World*, publicly pressured Thomas Crain, the district attorney of New York County, to call for a grand jury investigation since the police seemed to be hitting a wall with their own efforts to find answers about Crater's disappearance. On September 13, Crain finally agreed. By then, Crater had been missing for 37 days. The grand jury began hearing testimony regarding Crater's disappearance two days later. Prominent members of Tammany Hall said they believed that he was dead. The police's theory was that Crater had had an appointment with a young woman the night of his disappearance, but some of his friends tried to deny his womanizing.

In an effort to elicit more information, Crain sent Stella a list of 29 questions, but she was not forthcoming in her responses; more than half of them were either one-word answers or "I don't know." Crain was not satisfied. He began suggesting that Crater may have returned to Maine before his disappearance and that Stella was a possible suspect. Subsequent efforts to compel Stella to come to New York to testify before the grand jury failed. She said that she didn't want to talk about his "love affairs," and instead she and her mother moved to a hotel in Portland for the winter, remaining out of reach for the duration of Crain's investigation.

Crain turned his attention to Crater's finances. The judge had cashed \$5,130 in checks his final morning, leading to speculation that he had taken the money and used it to disappear voluntarily. However, Tammany Hall exacted a year's salary to support someone's appointment to a Supreme Court post. Within less than two months after being named to the bench, Crater raised just over \$15,500 from the sale of shares and sent Mara to two banks to withdraw another \$7,500. The combined total of \$23,000 was the equivalent of a year's annual salary for a Supreme Court justice in New York County. Crater's safe deposit box was empty, and yet another search of the Crater apartment turned up nothing new.

On January 9, 1931, the grand jury determined that there was not enough evidence to conclude whether Crater was dead or alive, whether he disappeared voluntarily, or whether he was the victim of foul play.

Stella returned to their Fifth Avenue apartment 10 days later, and that is when she opened a dresser drawer in her bedroom and found four manila envelopes that Crater had marked with her initials. Inside were \$6,690 in cash, \$2,600 in checks dated August 30 and that Crater had made payable to himself, another \$521 in checks, four bank books, Crater's will dated July 4, 1925, that left everything to Stella, the lease for the Fifth Avenue co-op apartment, and the deed for the Belgrade Lakes house and for some property that the Craters owned in Florida. Crater also had four life insurance policies totaling \$30,000.

Stella filed Joseph's will four days after she had returned to New York and two days after news of the discovery of the envelopes was made public. His estate was valued at more than \$50,000. It included five bank accounts worth a total of \$12,000, a brokerage account with a \$15,000 balance, four life insurance policies worth \$30,000, the Fifth Avenue apartment, fees and salary due him, and some Florida real estate. Crater was declared legally dead on June 6, 1939. Stella died at a Mount Vernon, New York, nursing home 30 years later, in 1969.

The Missing Persons Bureau of the New York Police Department finally closed the file on August 13, 1979, unsolved. However, the case made headlines again in 2005 after the death of 91-year-old Stella Fenucci-Good, of Queens, New York. In letters that she left her family, she said her husband learned over drinks with a police officer and his cab driver brother that one or both of them and several other men had killed Crater and buried him under the Coney Island Boardwalk in Brooklyn. The area was excavated in the 1950s to build the New York Aquarium, but no evidence of Crater was found.

## FURTHER READING

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Albert Johnson is believed to have used another alias, Arthur Nelson, while in the Yukon, but his true identity has never been found. National Archives of Canada.

# The Mad Trapper: Who Was Albert Johnson? (1931)

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*The manhunt for Albert Johnson marked the first time that police used two-way radios and an airplane in a manhunt.*

Albert Johnson carefully placed the three-foot-high stick upright beside the other one and wedged it into the sand on the riverbank. Then he straightened up and stepped back a few paces. Aware that other people were watching, he fixed his piercing blue eyes on the target, gripped a pistol in each hand, and shot the top off each stick. Then he crossed his arms in front of himself and shot again. He repeated this display of marksmanship a few times, shaving an inch off each stick every time.

It didn't take long for word of his proficiency with weapons to spread around Fort McPherson, a tiny settlement in the Northwest Territories in Canada's High Arctic. He had floated along the Peel River on a crude homemade raft and arrived in July 1931. He didn't want anyone prying into his business, and it certainly would not hurt to let people know that he was a good shot. After gathering enough supplies for the winter, Johnson built himself a small cabin in an isolated spot on the Rat River about 40 miles north of Fort McPherson.

In late summer 1931, Albert Johnson set up his cabin near the traplines of three men. As William Nerysoo followed his trapline in the area of the Rat River in December 1931, he realized that someone had been tampering with his traps. In addition, other Native trappers found their traps lifted, torn up, or hung on trees, and their bait scattered. This intrusion was very upsetting since these men relied on trapping to feed and clothe their families. Johnson was a newcomer to the district—and an unfriendly one at that. The men suspected immediately that he was the culprit, but they didn't dare confront him. He had threatened the people in the area with his rifle, and they were scared of him. Instead, William Nerysoo turned to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) for help.

When Constable Alfred King and Special Constable Joseph Bernard went to Johnson's cabin just after Christmas, smoke was drifting out of the chimney. His crude homemade snowshoes were resting against the outside wall. King snowshoed to the little front door and pounded on it. He announced that he was a member of the RCMP and explained that the detachment had received complaints that someone was interfering with traplines in the area and he wanted to ask Johnson a few questions about it. There was no response, however, just an eerie silence. Constable King knew that he needed a search warrant and reinforcements to confront Johnson. Two-way radios were not standard police equipment during the 1930s, so King could not contact the detachment

to ask for help. Instead, he and Special Constable Bernard got on their dogsleds and headed to the regional headquarters in Aklavik.

Police Inspector Alex Eames issued a search warrant and ordered two other constables to go with King and Bernard back to Johnson's cabin. Constable Robert McDowell took cover with a rifle just below the steep riverbank near Johnson's cabin. King walked across the clearing and knocked twice on the door. He informed Johnson that the RCMP had come with a search warrant this time. They would be forced to break down the door if he didn't open up.

Without warning, Johnson fired his gun at King from inside the cabin. The constable felt a burning sensation as the bullet tore into his chest. Then he crumpled to the snowy ground. During the exchange of gunfire that followed between McDowell and Johnson, King managed to crawl back to his partner. McDowell took one look at the wound and realized that he would have to act quickly to save King's life. He and the two special constables wrapped him in furs and tied him to the sled. With the wind chill, it was  $-88$  degrees Fahrenheit. Besides dealing with the bone-chilling cold and the fatigue of the sled dogs, the men travelled through a blinding blizzard, harsh temperatures, and howling winds. They covered 80 miles in a record 20 hours. King lay on his back in the sled, stoically enduring the continual burning sensation and soreness from his wound while struggling to breathe in the cold air. The surgeon in Aklavik discovered that Johnson's bullet had missed King's heart by an inch. Now Johnson was wanted for the attempted murder of a police officer.

## STAKEOUT OF JOHNSON'S CABIN

Inspector Eames didn't have enough men under his command to go after Johnson, so trappers from the area stepped forward and volunteered to join the Mounties in their quest to capture Johnson. A few days after McDowell had made his 20-hour trek to save King's life, Inspector Eames set off with a posse of eight men plus one guide and 42 dogs. The posse began battling especially bad weather as winds blew across the bleak landscape with a fierceness that stung any exposed flesh. The blowing snow created a white curtain that cut down visibility considerably. The men couldn't see more than a few feet ahead of them as they made their way around moving snowdrifts. Nevertheless, they plodded along towards Johnson's cabin, prodding the sled dogs to keep going. They were determined to arrest the man who had shot Constable King.



Keeping in mind that Johnson probably wouldn't surrender easily, Inspector Eames brought along 20 pounds of dynamite. He figured it could be used to blow a hole in Johnson's cabin if he refused to come out. As they got close to the cabin, Eames knew that a long siege would not be possible. Besides having a shortage of supplies, the men and dogs were tired from their trek through difficult weather conditions.

Johnson's cabin was surrounded by the Rat River on three sides, and this served to partially protect him. Although he was outnumbered, gunfire could only come from the two sides of the cabin where the riverbank lay, forming a half circle around him. Between the cabin and the riverbank, there was little in the way of cover except for the odd tree and a bit of brush. The posse took up its position below the cover of the riverbank, within 65 feet of the cabin. They could hear Johnson moving around inside the cabin. Eames called out to Johnson to surrender, but there was nothing but silence.

Eames knew that he could not afford to wait. He decided that the group's next move would be to break down Johnson's door and then to run inside and capture the fugitive. As soon as the men had cleared the riverbank to rush the cabin, Johnson began firing from the loopholes he had made on every side of his cabin in between the logs. The men took turns darting towards the cabin, zigzagging across the clearing to avoid the gunfire. Each time they ran past the four-foot door, they tried to pry it open by smashing the butts of their rifles against it.

Albert Johnson squatted inside his cabin and clutched a gun in each hand. He could hear the men outside, firing at him and trying to bash in his door as they raced past. Listening carefully, he realized he was far outnumbered; this time they had come with a much larger group. It was essential for his own safety that he keep them from storming his refuge. He knew their bullets could not penetrate the double rows of thick logs that surrounded the bottom of his cabin, but they could splinter the door and window. Taking advantage of a lull in the action, he stood up and stuck the barrel of one of his guns right up against a loophole he had made in between the logs. Then he began to fire. He would be fine as long as he could keep the police at bay. The longer he kept on shooting at them, the more likely they would tire and go away.

Despite the bullets, the men kept on running past his cabin. Trapper Knut Lang finally succeeded in shoving the door open, but Johnson spun around and fired at him from a gun in each hand. Instead of serving as a way into the cabin, the open doorway now gave Johnson another opening through which to shoot—and he used it. By nightfall

the temperature had dropped to  $-43$  degrees Fahrenheit. The air was so bitter that the men couldn't take off their fur mitts to fire their weapons for fear that their hands would freeze—despite the woollen gloves they wore under their mitts. Worse, they could not move around to stay warm because they had to keep their positions. Sweat had dampened their clothes, and the cold was starting to freeze the clothing to their skin. They built a fire and took turns standing by the flames.

The longer the men stayed, the more food the posse and the dogs consumed. Eames realized the posse would not be able to dislodge Johnson by shooting at him and storming his cabin. It was time to take the next step. Charges of dynamite were lobbed at the walls of his cabin in an effort to dislodge some of the logs and flush Johnson out, but to no avail. The cold had cut down on the effectiveness of the explosives, and most of the dynamite did not even ignite.

Under the cover of darkness and the fire of his comrades, Lang climbed over the riverbank and threw some sticks of dynamite onto the top of the cabin. The resulting explosion managed to blow a small hole in the roof and knock off the smokestack. Despite the explosion, Johnson remained undeterred.

By 3 AM, Eames had become desperate, as he knew they couldn't stay out much longer. It was cold, supplies were low, and his men were tired. The longer they stayed, the greater the likelihood they would run out of food. Eames took out the last four pounds of dynamite and tied the sticks together. Giving it his best pitch, Eames lobbed the package of dynamite at the cabin in an arc.

Suddenly, an explosion crashed through the silence of the stalemate. Johnson dove for cover as his cabin began crumbling around him. The door disintegrated, the roof blew off, and one of the walls caved in towards him. He gripped his weapons and prepared for the police's next attack.

Eames thought the size of the blast might have stunned Johnson, even momentarily, and he wanted to take full advantage of it. He and trapper Karl Gardlund rushed towards the cabin. Gardlund would blind the trapper with a flashlight while Eames tried to disarm him. When they got closer to their target, Gardlund turned on the flashlight and shone its beams into the remnants of the building. Johnson had heard them coming, however, and was ready. Holding a pistol in each hand, he shot the flashlight out of Gardlund's hand. Surprised, Eames and Gardlund fled back to the cover of the riverbank. Johnson remained steadfast in what was left of his cabin. Finally, at 4 AM. Eames called off the 15-hour siege.

The door of the cabin had been blown to shreds and the roof had been ripped off, but the occupant still remained inside. The posse left, minus their quarry.

## ON THE LAM

Johnson took advantage of the storms and blowing snow to make his getaway. He used the hard-packed tops of snowbanks to flee, knowing that the blowing snow would more easily erase his footprints and make it harder for his pursuers to pick up his trail. This bought him a bit of time and allowed him to put some distance between himself and the authorities.

While Inspector Eames prepared to go after Johnson again, he sent Constable Edgar Millen and trapper Karl Gardlund to keep an eye on Johnson. Nearly a week had passed since the siege. The two men crept towards the deserted cabin and poked around the wreckage; the front wall had collapsed and the roof had almost caved in. The two men were amazed that Johnson had not only survived the final dynamite blast on his refuge, but that he had fled afterwards. They searched the area for clues as to where he might have headed. They didn't find any pelts—odd for a trapper—and his cabin revealed no evidence of his identity. There was not a document nor a shred of paper to give them a clue of who he was or where he had come from.

Albert Johnson was at large, and word of the manhunt was getting out to the rest of the continent. Newspapers were covering the story, and listeners were glued to their radios. Even people as far away as the United States were starting to hear about the manhunt that was unfolding in the Great White North.

White men and Native trappers stepped forward to offer their help to catch Johnson. Canadian soldiers Frank Riddell and Earl Hersey joined the manhunt. Police officers going out on patrol didn't carry two-way radios at that time, but being able to ensure communication between the search party and the base in Aklavik was considered important for obtaining more supplies, more help, or a doctor if necessary. The two soldiers built a low-power transmitter and receiver and tested it with successful results. Their biggest challenge turned out to be packing the equipment in a compact manner so that it could withstand rough travel on a toboggan and not fall apart while traversing rough portages.

On January 16, 1932, Inspector Eames left Aklavik with eight men to meet up with Millen and Gardlund near Johnson's cabin. Despite their numbers, Johnson's pursuers faced immense obstacles that included

the extreme cold, blizzards, whipping and stinging winds, and the perpetual twilight of Arctic winters.

The group also had great distances to cover in their search for signs of Johnson's presence and an almost constant need for supplies for both the men and their dogs. The landscape offered its own challenges. The Rat River valley had thick brush, deep canyons, towering hills, and crooked streams—lots of places to hide. The storms that slowed down the posse continued to erase Johnson's tracks, leaving the men with no clues. The problem of dwindling supplies continued to plague the posse. Constable Millen stayed on the trail with Riddell, Noel Verville, and Karl Gardlund to continue the search. The rest of the posse returned to Aklavik.

As the search went on, the media continued to cover the manhunt. The dramatic story of one man fending off the Mounties was fascinating. How long would he continue to hold out? What was going to happen next? People were staying tuned for the saga's next instalment. The media speculated that Johnson was insane. A newspaper reporter coined the nickname "Mad Trapper" for Johnson—and it stuck.

It was becoming increasingly clear to Johnson's pursuers that he wasn't insane at all. He was wily, had incredible survival skills, and could certainly hold his own in the Arctic. The trapper wouldn't give up easily, and the police certainly had their work cut out for them. After chasing him for two weeks through the cold and unforgiving terrain, the men pursuing him were starting to develop a good idea of Johnson's habits and patterns of behavior.

Johnson preferred travelling along ridges where even the smallest wind would erase his tracks on the hard-packed snow. He often zig-zagged so that he could watch his pursuers from one side of the "z" as they made their way along the other side. This tactic made the men nervous because they realized that Johnson could ambush them. In addition, Johnson liked to create a forked trail. Since the men did not know which of the two sides of the forked trail might lead to Johnson, they had to follow both sets of tracks to find out, which allowed Johnson to move further away as the posse spent time following empty leads. Soon, he would be within reach of crossing the divide between the Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

## SHOOTOUT

The posse eventually found Johnson's camp. A noise when one of them slipped alerted him to their presence, and Johnson fired but missed.

The four men positioned themselves and fired blindly towards the camp through a thicket of trees. They hoped that one of their shots would find its target, but there was no response and no more shots from Johnson, only silence. The men were not sure whether the fugitive was injured or dead, so they waited.

After staying motionless in the bitter cold for about two hours waiting for Johnson to make a move, Constable Millen decided that they needed to break the stalemate. The group repositioned themselves. Millen remained on the bank and stood his ground. He got down on one knee and fired. Johnson fired back. Millen fired a second time, and Johnson replied with two more shots. With the third shot, Millen stood up, turned around, and fell face down into the snow. His empty rifle dropped down beside him at his feet. While the others continued to fire at Johnson, Gardlund crawled through the deep snow on his belly for about nine feet until he reached Millen's feet. Then he undid the constable's bootlaces and tied them together. He used the hastily made handle to drag Millen's body over to the cover of the bank and out of Johnson's line of fire. He and trapper Verville examined him, took his pulse, and realized that the bullet had killed him instantly. Johnson had struck again.

Once his pursuers had left his camp, Johnson climbed out of the hole in which he had sought refuge. He would need to get away quickly before the men returned—for they surely would. He grabbed some of his gear and collected fistfuls of snow. Then, using his axe to carve handholds in the ice and snow, he tacked the vertical cliff behind his camp. After scaling it, the wily trapper sent soft snow cascading down to cover his tracks before vanishing into the frigid Arctic night.

## AIRPLANE BROUGHT IN

The local radio station reported Millen's death to the men and women who lived in the Arctic as well as to people in the outside world. The murder of one Mountie and the wounding of another continued to draw public attention to the chase that was unfolding in the North. As word of Millen's death spread, more and more volunteers from around the region stepped forward to help with the manhunt. People were scared and wanted Johnson stopped.

Johnson was clever. He was living off the land by setting traps and snares to catch any small animals that he could eat. Larger game, like caribou, would require him to use his rifle. A shot could be heard by searchers and would help them find his location. Inspector Eames was facing a

fugitive who had incredible stamina and wilderness skills. Johnson was outmaneuvering the Mounties, and the inspector was starting to feel the pressure. If they didn't catch him soon, the entire police force would be mocked. Skis, snowshoes, and dogsleds would not be enough to capture Johnson. It was difficult to travel long distances in the bitter cold, especially through blizzards and over uneven terrain with sleds that were laden with heavy supplies. These challenging travel conditions gave Johnson an advantage on the terrain.

Eames was certain that the posse would not be able to catch Johnson using traditional police manhunt techniques. The only solution was to try something that had never been done before. What Eames needed was an airplane, as it would be easier to find the Mad Trapper's trail from the air than on the ground. The plane could travel longer distances more quickly, making it easier to expand the search to cover a wider area. Having a plane would also ease the problem of supplying a larger posse—it could be used to ferry supplies from Aklavik to the men who were out searching the terrain.

One problem with the plan, however, was that taking off and landing in the Arctic could be difficult. In a part of the country where landing strips were nonexistent and the terrain was uneven, there was always a chance that a pilot would have trouble finding a place to set down his plane, or that high winds and blowing snow would keep them from flying at all.

A plane had never before been used in a manhunt in Canada, but RCMP headquarters in Ottawa gave Eames approval to use one. As they waited for the plane to arrive, volunteers continued playing a critical role in the manhunt. There were now 17 men on the ground tracking Johnson, with Eames being the only police officer among them. The posse was certain that Johnson was heading towards the Richardson Mountains. These barren, treeless peaks range from 1,800 feet to 4,500 feet, and the wind chill can reach -100 degrees Fahrenheit.

Natives in the area insisted that no man could cross the divide alone in winter, but Johnson had little choice. With a growing number of men scouring the area, it was only a matter of time before they would catch him. He had been away from his cabin and cache of food for more than two weeks. He was cold, tired, and beginning to get weaker from a lack of proper nourishment. His pursuers, on the other hand, had proper food, supplies, and firewood to keep them warm. The dogs would help them to move quickly. There was nothing ahead of Johnson but the Richardson Mountains. There was no vegetation for cover, but

once over the divide he would be able to head straight for Alaska. All he had to do was continue to outwit and outmaneuver them to get there.

Distinguished World War I fighter pilot Captain Wilfrid “Wop” May flew to Aklavik to join the manhunt. He would transport supplies and personnel as well as look for Johnson’s tracks from the air. May’s presence was an asset to the posse, as he also delivered much-needed dog feed and arranged to bring more supplies from Aklavik. Now the men could better concentrate their efforts on trying to find Johnson.

With the supplies safely delivered, May flew off to see if he could spot Johnson’s tracks from the air. In one place a trail headed towards the divide between the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, and another went along the Barrier River and ended abruptly in some bush. They later spotted a faint trail going from there and ending in a circle. It was evident that Johnson had backtracked and camped off the main trail to be able to keep an eye on it from a distance. In a matter of minutes, May had scanned an area that would have taken the ground party more than a day to travel. From the vantage point overhead, he was able to see which trails were false leads designed to keep the trackers distracted while the Mad Trapper moved on.

The public and the media continued to stay glued to their radio sets for the latest news on the increasingly intense hunt for the Mad Trapper. One newspaper printed a front-page story and photo of Albert Johnson. Unfortunately, they soon discovered that it wasn’t the same Albert Johnson. The Mad Trapper’s namesake, a resident of British Columbia, angrily went to the newspaper’s office to complain. He said that the man in the photo was him, not the man being chased around the High Arctic. Although he had spent time trapping up in the Northwest Territories, he wasn’t the Mad Trapper and was certainly not wanted by the police. The newspaper was forced to print a retraction.

## END OF THE TRAIL

On February 12, word reached the posse that a group of Natives had spotted strange snowshoe tracks about two miles east of La Pierre House in the Yukon. They had been out hunting when they saw Johnson’s distinctive tracks crossing the very ones they had made that morning. It didn’t seem possible that Johnson had travelled 90 miles in three days, but from the description of the snowshoe prints, the group concluded that he had indeed. It was now evident that Johnson had climbed the barren and seemingly impassable Richardson Mountains during the

high winds and low temperatures of the previous few days. He had gone quite a distance.

Inspector Eames was astonished that a man who had been living off whatever small animals he could snare for the past month, and who was hauling his own supplies on his back, would even attempt this dangerous move—in the middle of a blizzard no less. With Johnson's pursuers getting closer and closer, he had little choice but to tackle the divide that the Native people in the area had said was impossible to cross alone in the dead of winter. However, the terrain and weather conditions were different in the Yukon. The soft and deep snow made footprints more evident, and there was little wind to erase them, so it would now be easier for his pursuers to pick up Johnson's trail.

Around the same time that the posse felt they were nearing Johnson, men in Old Crow wanted to form a posse of their own in case the Mad Trapper went down the Porcupine River. However, a shaman elder from the Old Crow band told them not to. "You no go look. One sleep and he die," the shaman predicted. Just before noon on February 17, 1932, Albert Johnson was making his way along the snaking Eagle River. He climbed a tree and looked out over the area to plan his route. Thinking the posse was ahead of him, he climbed back down and walked along the river for nearly a mile.

Canadian military staff sergeant Earl Hersey was driving the posse's first dog team, and he was approaching a sharp bend in the river when he spotted a man standing less than 350 yards away. Although he had been chasing the Mad Trapper for about a month, he had never actually seen him. When the man with the heavy backpack reached back and grabbed his snowshoes, Hersey recognized their distinctive shape and realized that he had finally come face to face with the fugitive who had been on the lam for seven weeks.

Johnson had been trying to backtrack, not realizing that his pursuers were so close behind. He looked up and was visibly surprised to see Hersey facing him. After quickly shoving his feet into his snowshoes and lacing them up, Johnson grabbed his rifle and dashed towards the riverbank, then around a point in the bend of the Eagle River.

Hersey grabbed his rifle from his sled and rushed towards the center of the river. He yelled at Johnson to surrender. Johnson ignored him and tried to run straight up the riverbank, which was about nine meters high. Hersey knew that it would be dangerous, even deadly, if Johnson reached the top of the riverbank. It would put him in a strategic position to pick off his pursuers one by one. Hersey fired at Johnson's packsack



three times, sending the outlaw slipping down the riverbank each time. He dropped down on one knee in the middle of the river and took careful aim at Johnson's shoulder with his .303 to wound him. The posse still wanted to try to capture their quarry alive. He barely had a chance to squeeze the trigger when Johnson reached for his rifle, turned around, and fired. Hersey felt a searing pain and then toppled over. He couldn't move from the waist down, but he wanted to make sure that Johnson didn't hit him again. Using his arms to dig in the soft snow, he made a small hole into which he could burrow.

By this time, the rest of the posse had rounded the bend in the Eagle River and joined the scene. They spread out on either riverbank and surrounded Johnson. With bullets whizzing around him, Johnson was unable to reach the bank and the cover of the brush. He threw himself down in the center of the river and burrowed into the soft deep snow. He lay on his side and shielded himself with his heavy pack. Johnson had sustained a leg wound when a bullet had struck a box of ammunition in his pocket, and the resulting explosion had blown a hole in his hip. He was also struck in the shoulder and in the side, but he started firing again and kept it up for 10 solid minutes.

As the gunfight was taking place on the ground, Wop May circled overhead, watching the action as it unfolded below. Some 20 minutes after Johnson had burrowed into the snow, May noticed that he was no longer shooting back and that his body was sprawled in an awkward position, face down. His right arm was stretched out, still holding his rifle. Detecting no movement, the pilot swooped low and tipped his wings to signal to the posse that it looked like the chase was finally over.

Johnson was dead. He had taken seven bullets to the legs, back, and shoulders. The fatal shot had passed through the small of his back, severing his spine. He had died while lying on his side, reloading his rifle. It was just after noon on February 17, 1932—49 days after Constable King had been shot. What had started out as a routine call had ended with the deaths of two men and serious wounds to two others.

Albert Johnson had battled freezing temperatures, hunger, and blizzards for five weeks. He had travelled about 150 miles through difficult terrain and spent at least one night in the windy and treeless mountains that separate the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. He died about 170 miles from the Alaskan border with just a dead squirrel for food. But it had taken seven Mounties, three special constables, and more than 30 civilians to track him down. He had resisted desperately to the end, and everyone was relieved that the manhunt was finally over.

The injured Earl Hersey was bundled up. Wop May made the 125-mile flight to the hospital in Aklavik in 45 minutes. One bullet had caused three wounds. After grazing his knee and entering his elbow, the bullet had come out the upper arm, gone into his chest, and hit one of his lungs. The chest injury caused internal bleeding, and the doctor did not use any anaesthetic while tying off the arteries to stop the hemorrhaging. If the plane had arrived in Aklavik 15 minutes later, Hersey would not have survived.

All that was left of Johnson's presence were the remnants of his cabin, an old canoe, and a carefully concealed cache of supplies. There was no trace of his true identity. The body of Albert Johnson was never claimed. He was buried on March 9, 1932, under a spruce tree in Aklavik.

## WHO WAS ALBERT JOHNSON?

Two Canadian filmmakers decided to tackle the mystery of Johnson's true identity 75 years later. As part of a documentary for the Discovery Channel, they assembled a team of forensics experts to exhume and examine the body for clues. They discovered that the permafrost had preserved Johnson's skeleton, four fingernails, and some hair.

Using a new technique, forensic anthropologist Dr. Lynne Bell examined the oxygen isotopes in the enamel of Johnson's teeth. She concluded that Johnson grew up either in the midwestern United States or Norway, which supported theories that Johnson was either a Scandinavian immigrant or bank robber Johnny Johnson from the American Midwest. When forensic odontologist Dr. David Sweet compared a distant relative's DNA to that of Johnson, however, it was not a match. The secret of Johnson's true identity and why he sparked the largest manhunt in the Canadian Arctic remains buried in his grave.

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Examining the bloody bathtub where Frank Dolezal confessed to dismembering the body of Mrs. Florence Pollilo, Cleveland, Ohio, 1939. L to R: Sheriff O'Donnell, Detective Harry Brown, Jailer Mike Kilbane (stooped), Dr. E. F. Echer. Special Collections, Cleveland State University Library.

## Preying on the Poor: The Cleveland Torso Killer (1934–1938)

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*The serial killings that stalked Cleveland's poor for four years marked the first time that a national magazine offered a reward in an attempt to find the murderer.*

Every morning before leaving for work, 34-year-old Frank LaGassie would wander around the beach on Lake Erie looking for driftwood to burn. Just before 8 AM on September 5, 1934, he was walking near Euclid Beach Park, eight miles east of downtown Cleveland, when something in the distance caught his eye. When he got closer, he realized that what he first thought was a partially buried piece of tree trunk was actually the lower half of a woman's torso, with her legs amputated at the knees.

He ran to a neighbor's house and called the police. Cuyahoga County coroner Arthur J. Pearce examined the victim and concluded that she had been dead for about six months, and the discovered part of her body had been in the water for about three or four months. A preservative had been used, which explained why her body was not more decomposed. Pearce believed that she was in her mid- to late thirties. An abdominal scar was the only distinguishing mark, but a hysterectomy was such a common operation that he didn't think this information would be of much help in identifying her.

The next day, handyman Joseph Hejduk read in the newspaper about the body's discovery and contacted former Lake County sheriff James Moloney. Two weeks earlier, he had found what appeared to be a person's vertebrae and ribs 30 miles east in North Perry. Special Lake County deputy sheriff Melvin Keener told him at the time that they were animal parts, so he buried them in the sand. Moloney passed the information on to Cleveland police. The upper torso, which showed signs of having been cut with a knife, matched the lower half that LaGassie had found two days earlier. Despite a full-scale search along Lake Erie, the upper part of an arm was the only other body part ever to be recovered.

Police scoured the missing person reports of 31 women who had disappeared in the previous six months—the timeline during which the coroner believed the victim had been killed. None of the women had an abdominal scar. The victim's remains were placed in a box with the number 102-3 and buried in potter's field in Highland Park Cemetery. Unable to determine her real name, police would come to know her as the Lady of the Lake. No arrests were made in connection with her murder.

## BODIES ALONG KINGSBURY RUN

A year later on September 23, 1935, 16-year-old James Wagner and 12-year-old Peter Kostura were playing at the top of Jackass Hill, a 60-foot slope along Kingsbury Run. The area in the heart of Cleveland was once a peaceful place where city dwellers went to enjoy quiet walks and picnics amid brooks and trees. By the 1930s, Kingsbury Run was a gully that had become a derelict jungle of weeds, bushes, and debris with railroad tracks cutting through it and hobos living in hovels within it.

When the softball the two boys were tossing back and forth that September day went sailing down the hill, Wagner challenged his friend to a race. When he reached the bottom, he noticed something in the bushes a few yards away. Looking more closely, he realized that it was the remains of a naked, headless man wearing nothing but a pair of cotton socks.

When the police arrived, they noticed that the victim had been emasculated. There was no blood either on the body or the ground, and the man appeared to have been killed elsewhere and the body was dumped where the teenager had found it. About 30 feet away, the police quickly found the decapitated body of a second older and stockier naked man who had also been emasculated. There were signs that the victim had been preserved using a chemical.

The head belonging to the first body was found buried in the ground about 20 feet from the body. There was just enough hair above the surface of the loose earth to help police find it. The second victim's head was found 70 feet from its body. The severed genitals were found in a pile near one of the bodies, and some blood-soaked clothing was located nearby. Both men had been mutilated with a knife. Police believed they were looking for a homosexual sadist, but they had no leads.

Within hours, the first victim was identified through his fingerprints as 29-year-old Edward W. Andrassy. Deputy Coroner Wilson Chamberlain estimated that he had been dead for two or three days and that he had died from being decapitated. Andrassy was a medical orderly who had a reputation as a womanizer and who had minor brushes with the law. In 1931, he was incarcerated for a month for carrying a concealed weapon. His family saw him alive for the last time on September 19 at about 8 PM, when he came looking for his brother. Four days later, his father identified Edward Andrassy's body at the morgue.

The second victim was 40 to 45 years old, and his body was too decomposed to identify him through fingerprinting. He was believed

to have died as much as three or four weeks earlier. On September 25, 1935, he was buried in a potter's field, taking the secret of his identity to his grave. The following morning, exactly a week after his family had last seen him alive, Andrassy was buried in St. Mary's Cemetery.

## MORE VICTIMS

In the dead of winter on January 26, 1936, a woman became tired of listening to the incessant barking of a neighborhood dog near Kingsbury Run. She bundled up and went outside to investigate. She lived in a run-down area that had small manufacturing buildings, a few shops, and old apartment buildings.

The woman found two baskets sitting in the snow behind the Hart Manufacturing building. She walked over to a local butcher shop and told the owner about a couple of baskets filled with hams wrapped in newspaper. When he went to investigate, he was horrified to find himself staring at the frozen parts of a human body: the lower half of a female torso, two thighs, a right arm, and a hand. The baskets had been covered with two burlap sacks.

Police took fingerprints and brought the remains to the morgue. The victim was identified as Florence Polillo, a part-time prostitute in her forties. The landlady at the rooming house where she lived had last seen Polillo when she left on January 24 at 8:30 PM. The coroner estimated that the victim was murdered and dismembered later that night. Two weeks after Polillo was believed to have been murdered police found her upper torso, both lower legs, and her left arm in the yard of a vacant building. Her head was never found. Neither was her killer.

The summer of 1936 was an important one for Cleveland. The city would host the Republican Party national convention from June 9 to June 12, and the opening of the Great Lakes Exposition was to follow on June 27. This 100-day event was being held to celebrate Cleveland's centennial as an incorporated city.

On June 5, just a few days shy of the Republican National Convention, two young boys were walking through Kingsbury Run at about 8:20 AM when they saw a pair of trousers wrapped in a bundle under a willow tree. Louis Cheeley, 11, and Gomez Ivey, 13, thought there might be money in the pockets and poked the bundle with a fishing pole. A human head rolled out. The latest victim had been found only a mile from where Andrassy and his nameless companion were located nearly nine months earlier.

With no fingerprints upon which to turn for clues, the head would be the only way to possibly identify the victim. After cleaning it, the coroner's office put it on display at the morgue. Over the course of the evening of June 5 and the following morning, some 2,000 people walked through and examined it, but nobody recognized the man.

The following afternoon, on June 6, two railroad workers found a heavily tattooed naked body located 1,000 feet from where the head had been found. The coroner estimated that the man was 25 to 30 years old and had been killed about 48 hours before the first of his remains was found. The cause of death was attributed to decapitation. Police combed missing person records, hoping the tattoos would lead them to the victim's identity, but it proved to be a dead end. So were his fingerprints, as they weren't on file with any official agency.

A photo of the head was published in newspapers and a description of the victim was broadcast on the radio, but to no avail. Authorities displayed a plaster death mask of the head at the popular Great Lakes Exposition. Thousands of visitors stared at the mask throughout the summers of 1936 and 1937, but nobody stepped forward to identify the man.

On July 22, 1936, 17-year-old Marie Barkley was hiking through a wooded area near her home in the Cleveland suburb of Brooklyn Heights when she stumbled upon a naked, decapitated, and decomposed male body at about 11:30 AM. Police found the head more than 10 feet from the body. It appeared that the man had been killed where his remains were found, and his bloodstained clothing was located nearby.

The victim was about 40 years old and had been dead for two months, longer than the tattoo man who had been discovered the previous month. He was the serial killer's only victim on the city's west side. The body and the clothes bore no identifying marks, and there were no papers in the pockets of his clothing. The corpse was too decomposed for fingerprinting to be successful, and a search of missing person reports proved fruitless in identifying the body.

A vagrant was sitting on an abutment in Kingsbury Run on the morning of September 10, 1936, when he spotted two halves of a headless, white male torso minus the limbs, floating in the murky water. Hundreds of onlookers gathered to watch as police and firefighters dragged the water and found the lower half of both legs.

The victim was about 25 to 30 years old and had been emasculated. Judging by the way in which the body was dismembered, police believed that the killer had some knowledge of human anatomy. They speculated



that he was either a medical student or a butcher. Unless the victim's arms and head turned up, it would be impossible to identify him. An estimated 100,000 people came to the area the next day to watch the police operation as divers searched the water unsuccessfully. The investigation had turned into a public circus.

## SERIAL KILLER ON THE LOOSE

It was now clear that a savage serial killer was on the loose in Cleveland. Police detectives Peter Merylo and Martin Zalewski were assigned to work on the case full time. They investigated hundreds of leads over the next two years and interviewed and eliminated a number of suspects, but they never tracked down the torso killer.

Newspapers began talking about a crazed killer and a human butcher, dubbing him The Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run. Newspapers started devoting more space to the murders, which boosted circulation figures, but authorities were concerned about the potential for public panic.

In an editorial that appeared on September 12, 1936, the *Cleveland News* commented, "Of all horrible nightmares come to life, the most shuddering is the fiend who decapitates his victims in the dark, dank recesses of Kingsbury Run." The newspaper also promised a \$1,000 reward, a large amount of money for the time, for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the Kingsbury Run murderer.

The murders presented negative publicity for the city while the Great Lakes Exposition was happening. They were more than embarrassing national news headlines for Cleveland, as the stories were also feeding anti-American propaganda in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. The Hitler-controlled press of Germany pointed out in editorials how decadent a society the United States must be that a killer could run free.

Publicity about the murders led to a flood of people contacting the police with tips and letters offering solutions to the killings, but the police came no closer to closing the case. Five of the victims were not identified and had not been reported missing, which led investigators to the conclusion that they were vagrants—or at least they had nobody close enough to be curious about their disappearance.

## INVESTIGATION INTENSIFIED

Eliot Ness had become Cleveland's safety director in December 1935. With the public getting increasingly worried about the unsolved murders,

Ness took charge of the investigation on September 12, 1936. Three days later, Coroner A. J. Pearce held an emergency meeting at the Central Police Station. More than 30 police officials and medical experts got together to examine and discuss each piece of evidence collected in the case so far.

The group concluded that the killer was a large, powerful man because he was able to wield a knife with such strength and haul the bodies into an area of Kingsbury Run that was not accessible by car. He probably dismembered his victims somewhere in one of the neighborhoods around Kingsbury Run.

On February 23, 1937, 55-year-old Robert Smith was walking along the beach searching for driftwood at Beulah Park on Lake Erie, located 10 miles northeast of Kingsbury Run. At 1:40 PM he saw something white just off the shore. At first he thought it was a sheep or a dog's body, but he notified police when he realized that it was human remains, specifically the upper half of a woman's headless and armless torso. Her remains were found not far from where the first victim had been spotted in September 1934. There were no footprints; the torso had washed up on the beach. Police fanned out looking for other remains. The pathologist examined the victim and said that she was 25 to 35 years old and that she had died within the past two to four days. The lower torso surfaced on May 5, 1937, but the head, arms, and legs were never found, and the victim was never identified.

In March 1937 Cuyahoga County coroner Samuel Gerber issued a report about the first seven murders. He said that the absence of blood clots in four of the victims suggested death by decapitation, or they were decapitated soon after being murdered. Without any viable leads, Police Chief George Matowitz wrote to Cleveland newspaper editors in April 1937 asking them to tell their readers to report anything suspicious to the police.

The remains of the next victim were found on June 6, 1937. Teenager Russell Lauer was on his way home at 5:40 PM when he walked past the Lorain-Carnegie Bridge. He stopped to take a closer look at something sticking out of a relatively fresh pile of garbage and dirt. It was a skull. Police found a burlap bag beneath the Lorain-Carnegie Bridge that spans the Cuyahoga River. It contained a human skeleton minus the arms and legs, and the pathologist determined that it was from a petite African-American woman 30 to 40 years old who had been dead for about a year. Police hoped that her bridgework would help them identify her.

Police Detective Peter Merylo tentatively identified the torso killer's latest victim as 40-year-old Rose Wallace, but Wallace had apparently disappeared on August 21, 1936, nearly three months after coroner Gerber estimated the time of death. The Cincinnati dentist who was responsible for her bridgework had died 15 years earlier, and her dental records were destroyed, so a positive identification through dental records could never be confirmed. In April 1938 a man told police that he believed the victim was his mother, Rose Wallace, despite the fact that the timing of her disappearance did not fit with the coroner's timeline. This development did not bring Merylo any closer to finding the killer.

Two men spotted something white floating in the Cuyahoga River on the morning of July 6, 1937, and it turned out to be the lower half of a male torso. The torso's upper half was found in a burlap bag wrapped in three-week-old newspaper. Police searched the river and found the right thigh, left thigh, left lower leg, and left upper arm. The next day they found the forearms with the hands attached, making fingerprinting a possibility. The right upper arm and lower right leg turned up later, but the head was never found. The man was 40 years old, and he had been killed 48 hours earlier. State and federal identification bureaus checked the fingerprints of the victim through civilian and military records, but without success. By mid-July police had everything except the latest victim's head and his name.

### REWARD OFFERED

By October police had made no further progress in the case. *Official Detective Stories* magazine promised a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Cleveland's torso killer—as long as the magazine gained exclusive rights to the informant's story. This was the first time that a national magazine had offered a reward of this nature in a multiple murder case. Predictably, letters (signed and unsigned) and phone calls poured in, as did tips from police informants and detectives working on other cases. As many as 50 tips a day came to police attention, but none led to the torso killer. Merylo and Zalewski, who were working on the case full time, had questioned more than 1,500 people by March 1938.

A lower leg was discovered in the Cuyahoga River on April 8, 1938. Three weeks later, on May 2, police found a burlap sack containing both halves of a headless torso, another thigh, and a left foot. They matched the leg found a month earlier. The female victim of about 25 to 30 years

old had been dead for a month before being found. A massive amount of morphine was detected in her system, but like most of the serial killer's victims, she was never identified.

The torso killer's final victims were found on August 16, 1938. Three men who scraped out a meager living selling reusable scrap and junk to dealers were pawing through a dump at about 4 P.M. While walking into a five-foot gully, 21-year-old James Dawson spotted a bundle covered by a neat pile of rocks. When he pushed them aside, the smell was putrid. There were human bones, and the men called the police.

A human torso was wrapped in the same type of heavy brown paper that butchers use as well as in a tattered, colorful quilt. Another package wrapped in brown paper had the thighs held together with a rubber band. Another package five feet away contained the severed head. The police also found the arms and lower legs. It was the first time the torso killer had left the entire body behind. The female victim was murdered sometime between February and April 1938. While searching the area, the police also uncovered the bones of a 30- to 40-year-old male who had been decapitated. It was believed that he was killed seven to nine months before he was found.

After the twelfth victim was discovered, pilots of the National Guard flew over the area where the remains of the eleventh victim had been spotted. They hoped the aerial photos could lead police closer to the killer. Over a period of four years, the Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run had claimed a dozen victims. Only two would be identified. Nobody had reported any one of them missing, which led police to speculate that the torso killer targeted transients, prostitutes, and other marginalized people living on the fringe of society.

## **RAID ON KINGSBURY RUN**

At 12:40 A.M. on August 18, 1938, 25 detectives and uniformed policemen led by Ness pulled up in 11 vehicles and prepared to raid the hobo jungles of Kingsbury Run. Less than half an hour later, some positioned themselves to block off possible escape routes from the shantytown while others moved quietly through the darkness and towards the sprawl of dilapidated shacks.

A searchlight mounted atop a fire truck shone a light on the scene as police officers moved from one shack to another. They banged on doors and woke the residents. They rounded up the occupants from about 30 huts, brought them to the police station, and then burned

down the hovels. The vagrants were fingerprinted in case they ever became victims of the Butcher. Ness justified the raid publicly as an attempt to deprive the killer of his prey.

Other communities in the United States claimed that the headhunter had visited them, too. Severed parts turned up near Albany and Oswego, New York, as well as in New Castle, Pennsylvania. No connection with the Cleveland killer was found. Cleveland police also followed up on hundreds of clues, some of which turned out to be sheep's bones, a pile of chicken bones, and discarded spare ribs. Residents were so frightened that they "saw" torsos and discarded human remains everywhere.

Police reasoned that the "Mad Butcher" likely owned a car in which to transport the bodies, and lived alone in a quiet area that would not arouse the curiosity of his neighbors. That meant he was likely well off, and the skill that he demonstrated in the way he cut up his victims' bodies suggested some medical training. Ness and his team quietly made inquiries and found a suspect in 1938 who seemed to fit the description.

## SUSPECTS

Dr. Francis Sweeney was a physician with a history of psychiatric treatments dating from at least December 1933. He was brought in for questioning, but he never admitted to the murders. Nine days after the last official torso victim was found in Cleveland, Sweeney had himself committed to the Soldiers and Sailors Home in Sandusky, Ohio, on August 25, 1938. He died on July 9, 1964, but the case against him as the Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run was never proven.

The Cleveland Police Department received the following letter addressed to the police chief, dated December 23, 1938, and mailed from Los Angeles:

Chief of Police Matowitz:

You can rest easy now, as I have come to sunny California for the winter. I felt bad operating on those people, but science must advance. I shall astound the medical profession, a man with only a D.C.

What did their lives mean in comparison to hundreds of sick and disease-twisted bodies? Just laboratory guinea pigs found on any public street. No one missed them when I failed. My last case was successful. I know now the feeling of Pasteur, Thoreau, and other pioneers.

Right now I have a volunteer who will absolutely prove my theory. They call me mad and a butcher, but the truth will come out.

I have failed but once here. The body has not been found and never will be, but the head, minus the features, is buried on Century Boulevard, between Western and Crenshaw. I feel it my duty to dispose of the bodies as I do. It is God's will not to let them suffer.

"X"

No buried heads were found at the location that the letter's author indicated, and the investigation shifted back to Cleveland. The Cuyahoga County Sheriff's investigators discovered that Florence Polillo and Rose Wallace knew each other and frequented the same bar, as did Edward Andrassy. They theorized that the victims had known each other and that the perpetrator had won their confidence before killing them one at a time.

They thought they had found a connection between the victims when they learned of a man called Frank Dolezal. The 52-year-old Slavic immigrant bricklayer lived not far from where parts of the victims had been found. Polillo had lived with him, and Dolezal had sometimes visited Wallace. He had a penchant for carrying knives, brandishing them, and sometimes threatening to use them on his acquaintances. Investigators searched his four-room apartment and found black stains in the cracks of the floor and the baseboard, and they theorized that it was dried blood. They took scrapings, and a chemist identified them as blood. Stains on two of four knives said to have once been in Dolezal's possession were discovered to be dried blood.

Chief Deputy Sheriff John Gillespie thought that he was on the trail of the serial killer. On July 5, 1939, he arrested Dolezal at 6 PM and took him to Cuyahoga County jail for questioning. After two days of interrogation, Dolezal signed a confession to having killed Polillo in self-defense during a drunken argument. In a preliminary hearing, Justice of the Peace Myron J. Penty reduced the murder charge against Dolezal to manslaughter.

Then the case against Dolezal began falling apart. The details he gave of the Polillo killing did not match the information police possessed. He said that he threw Polillo's head, lower legs, and left arm into Lake Erie, yet all of these parts except for the head were found in the back of a vacant building. Dolezal also said that he had placed Polillo's coat

and shoes behind the Hart Manufacturing Company's building, but the items of clothing were never found. Dr. E. E. Ecker, a pathologist with Cleveland's Western Reserve University, tested the scrapings earlier identified as blood and said emphatically that they were not human blood.

Dolezal recanted his confession and charged that detectives had forcefully extracted a confession from him. He committed suicide on August 24, 1939. He allegedly hanged himself in his jail cell from a wall hook that was shorter than him, but an autopsy revealed that he had suffered from four broken ribs, which led to speculation that police had beaten him.

The county sheriff's office, the city police, and Eliot Ness each carried out intensive investigations but never found the Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run. By October 1, 1942, Merylo was taken off the case. Like most of his victims, the identity of the Mad Butcher has never been determined.

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In 1932, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to make a solo transatlantic flight.  
The Illustrated London News Picture Library.

# Downed: The Disappearance of Amelia Earhart (1937)

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*The enduring story of American pilot Amelia Earhart's disappearance over the Pacific Ocean captured the public's imagination and remains a mystery that has sparked a multitude of theories.*

Amelia Earhart saw her first airplane at the age of 11, when her father Edward took her to the Iowa State Fair in the summer of 1908. The plane that was on display was made of wood and rusty metal. Earhart may not have known it then, but it was the beginning of a lifelong passion for flying.

In December 1917, Earhart went to visit her sister Muriel in Toronto, Canada, for Christmas. After seeing wounded soldiers in the streets, she decided to become a Red Cross volunteer. She worked in the kitchen and dispensary at Spadina Military Hospital until just after the war ended on November 11, 1918. Some of the patients were veterans who were pilots, and they told Earhart stories about the Royal Flying Corps. During World War I, planes were initially used for reconnaissance, then as bombers, and finally as fighter planes to attack or protect other types of planes. She was fascinated with flying and would watch former patients practice at the military airfield at nearby Arbour Heights.

When Earhart visited her parents in Los Angeles in 1920, air shows had become a popular form of entertainment. She often brought her father along whenever she went to see them, but she was not satisfied as a mere spectator, and soon she began taking flying lessons. She made her first flight in 1920, which was piloted by Frank Hawks, and she decided not to return to Columbia University to study medicine. She had found her passion in life.

Pioneering female pilot Neta Snook gave Earhart flying lessons, and in 1921 Earhart made her first solo flight in a Kinner Airster. Later that year she crash-landed in a cabbage patch. The accident may have put her off cabbages, but it didn't dampen her enthusiasm for flying. Thirteen months after her first solo flight, Earhart scraped together the savings from her job at a telephone company and pawned her few valuable possessions to buy her first airplane. The Kinner Canary was her twenty-fifth birthday present to herself. She earned her pilot's license in May 1923 and quickly set an altitude record for women, flying at a height of 14,000 feet. She shrugged it off, saying, "I really wouldn't have cared about the record except it may help Bill Kinner sell his planes."

In 1925, Earhart went to Boston with her mother and sister after their parents' troubled marriage ended. She sold her plane and bought a yellow convertible sports car. Another stint at Columbia University made her

realize that medicine was not for her. She found a job as a social worker at a Boston community center called Denison House, helping immigrants integrate into the community, but she continued to fly in her spare time and joined the National Aeronautics Association's local chapter.

## WOMEN IN AVIATION

One afternoon in April 1928, the telephone rang at Denison House. The man on the other end said he was looking for someone who might be interested in doing something for aviation even though there was some danger involved. A member of the NAA had recommended her, and Earhart was intrigued. In May 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh had become the first man to fly across the Atlantic Ocean, and American heiress Amy Phipps Guest wanted to be the first woman to perform the same feat. She bought a three-engine Fokker specially fitted with pontoons to land on water, but her family would not allow her to make the attempt, so she decided instead to sponsor a flight for another female pilot. However, the woman would be a passenger on the plane. She asked her friend, prominent publisher George Palmer Putnam, to lead the search for the right woman. Explorer Richard E. Byrd suggested Amelia Earhart. They met in Putnam's New York office, and she was picked for the flight soon after.

The event generated great public interest. Newspaper headlines shouted, "Boston Social Worker to Fly Atlantic" and "Girl Pilot Dares the Atlantic." On June 17, 1928, Earhart, pilot Wilmer Stultz, and mechanic Lou Gordon climbed aboard the *Friendship* and left Trepassy Bay, Newfoundland. Sitting between two fuel tanks behind the cockpit, Earhart kept the log of the plane's speed, altitude, and navigational directions during the flight. The trio flew through much heavy fog and landed in Burry Port, Wales, after 20 hours and 40 minutes. More than 2,000 people greeted their arrival, and many were fascinated by a woman aviator.

Earhart stressed to reporters that she was not at the controls on the flight, yet she was the one who captured the public's attention. "First Woman Flies Atlantic" blared the *New York World's* front page. She was given a hero's welcome in Britain and the United States, where the grey-eyed blonde appeared dressed in a pilot's outfit: helmet, leather jacket, riding breeches, and leather boots.

The flight fueled Earhart's desire to fly the Atlantic herself. She wanted to promote the role of women in aviation and prove their ability as pilots.

Opportunities to make or break new records were plentiful—and she intended to take them. She quit her job at Denison House, and with Putnam’s encouragement she wrote a book called *20 Hrs 40 Mins* about her flight on the *Friendship*.

In 1928, Earhart became the first woman to make a solo round trip flight across the United States. The following year she helped found the 99s, an organization that was named for the number of charter members, and served as its president until 1933. Putnam divorced his wife in 1930 and married Earhart on February 7, 1931. He became her manager, publicist, and promoter who arranged for her to write books and articles and give lectures about her flying experiences. Fees from these activities helped Earhart support herself and cover the many expenses involved in flying.

Two months after their marriage in 1931, Earhart set an altitude record in an autogiro, a single-propeller aircraft that could take off and land without a runway. A month later, she flew it alone across the continent and back. It was a warm-up for her next adventure. On May 20, 1932, Earhart left Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, at dusk in a red Lockheed Vega monoplane. She sipped tomato juice through a straw as she flew across the Atlantic. Her faulty altimeter made it hard to record the plane’s altitude over the sea. Ice formed on the wings, so she would drop to just above the water to remain below the altitude at which ice forms on the wings.

After flying solo across the Atlantic in just over 15 hours, Earhart landed a bit off course in a farmer’s pasture in Londonderry, Ireland. Unaccustomed to airplanes, the horses, sheep, and cows were agitated by the strange bird appearing in their midst. Earhart had become the first woman pilot to successfully cross the Atlantic Ocean solo, and she was awarded the first Distinguished Flying Cross to be given to a woman by the U.S. Congress, the French Legion of Honour, and the Gold Medal of the National Geographic Society. Three years later, she made the first solo flight from Honolulu, Hawaii to the American mainland, and about 10,000 people greeted her arrival in Oakland, California. She also became the first person to fly nonstop from Mexico City to Newark, New Jersey.

In 1934, Earhart was the guest speaker at a conference that the *New York Herald Tribune* held on the topic of “Women and the Changing World.” Dr. Edward C. Elliott, president of Indiana’s Purdue University, was in the audience. His school’s 6,000 students included close to 1,000 young women, and it was the only university in the United States

to have its own airport, equipped for day and night flying. Impressed with Earhart, Elliott invited her to be a visiting faculty lecturer one month a year. She would serve as a role model to inspire female students, provide career counseling, give lectures, and be a special adviser to the university's aeronautics department. Earhart was officially appointed to the faculty at Purdue in Lafayette, Indiana, on June 2, 1935.

## PLANNING THE NEXT TRIP

The Purdue Research Foundation set up the Amelia Earhart Fund for Aeronautic Research. By early 1936, it had raised enough money to buy a new twin-engine, 10-passenger Lockheed Electra transport plane that she could use and with which she could experiment. Earhart quickly dubbed the all-metal monoplane with retractable landing gear "the flying laboratory." The passenger seats had been removed to make way for two large tanks that could hold about 1,000 gallons of fuel. They were bolted in place behind the cockpit and would give the plane an additional flying range of up to 4,000 miles. A complete navigation room lay behind the tanks.

Earhart began working on her next project. She said she had "just one more long flight in [her] system." Although men had flown around the world, she planned to take a route along the equator because it was the longest route and had never been attempted. She wanted to study the effect of high altitudes, long distances, and extreme temperatures on people and planes. It was also a chance to show the stuff that women are made of. As Earhart explained, "There was my belief that now and then women should do for themselves what men have already done—and occasionally what men have not done—thereby establishing themselves as persons, and perhaps encouraging other women toward greater independence of thought and action." After her final long flight, she planned to settle down and only fly for fun, for traveling to lecture tours, or to conduct research at Purdue.

The longest trip of Earhart's life would require careful and intense planning. Former U.S. Navy commander Clarence S. Williams was hired to prepare the maps and navigational charts, including the compass courses, distances between points, and the precise times at which to change directions. The 27,000-mile route along the equator would take her from Oakland to Honolulu, then to Howland Island over to New Guinea, on to Darwin, Australia, across Africa, and then over the South Atlantic to Brazil. She planned to cross more than 6,500 miles

of water in three hops, with no land on two of the stretches of water. Collecting data about airports, weather, winds, terrain, and potential places for emergency landings was no mean feat.

Racing pilot Paul Mantz was hired as a technical adviser to supervise the readiness of the plane. He took it up on many test flights, and he also tutored Earhart in long-distance flying and navigation. Earhart's husband George Putnam handled the task of finding places for the plane to land and stops to store fuel, oil, and spare parts. He also managed such paperwork as securing permission from foreign governments to land as well as obtaining passports and visas, health certificates, and medical papers. After much research, Putnam found 30 places to cache fuel throughout the world.

Meanwhile, Earhart flew back and forth between Burbank and San Francisco to work out the "bugs" in the plane's engine as she prepared for her round-the-world flight. On August 29, 1936, she flew from Burbank to New York in the Bendix Trophy Race, as she wanted to test her "dream" airplane and hoped to do well in the competition. The fuel line developed a problem and the Electra arrived last among the contestants. The necessary repairs were made, and Earhart continued to test her equipment with repeated flights.

The plan was to capitalize on the weather by flying around the world from west to east. Mantz was to act as co-pilot of the Electra during the Oakland-Hawaii leg of Earhart's around-the-world flight. Former Pan American Airways navigator Fred Noonan would continue on until Howland Island, where he would take a Coast Guard vessel back to Hawaii. Captain Harry Manning, on leave from the SS *President Roosevelt*, would be dropped off in Brisbane, Australia. Earhart would complete the rest of the trip alone.

On March 17, 1937, Putnam poked his head inside the plane and kissed his wife goodbye. The tanks were filled with nearly 1,000 gallons of fuel and the weather had finally cleared. Earhart left the Oakland airstrip at 4:37 PM. Several hundred people greeted her arrival at Wheeler Field in Honolulu at 5:40 AM just before dawn the following morning. She had flown 2,410 miles in 15 hours and 51 minutes—a record for the fastest westward flight to Honolulu.

The next stop was Howland Island, 600 miles closer to Honolulu than the first leg from Oakland. The weather was too poor to continue on to the South Pacific Island that was barely larger than a polka dot. Two days later, 75 people came to see Earhart, Noonan, and Manning take off just before dawn on March 20, 1937. The plane began to sway

as it taxied down the runway. The left wing dropped, the right wheel was sheared off, and the landing gear collapsed. Earhart was not deterred by the incident.

The Electra was disassembled and sent to Burbank, California, by ship to be repaired by manufacturer Lockheed. The ideal window for flying conditions was slowly closing. While the plane was being fixed, Earhart pored over weather maps to plan a new route. She needed to complete the Caribbean and African legs of the trip by the middle of June to avoid bad weather, and she decided to journey east instead of west because the seasonal weather conditions would be more favorable. She also thought that flying from Burbank to Miami would give her a chance to test the repaired Electra. After that, she would fly down the coast of South America and across to Africa before continuing on to Asia, Australia, and the South Pacific before finally landing in California.

Arrangements were made to have a Coast Guard vessel stationed at tiny Howland Island so that the Electra could use its presence to detect the ship's radio signals, find the landing strip that had been built especially for the flight, and refuel. Manning's leave had expired, and he needed to return to his ship, so Noonan was pressed into service as navigator.

On May 21, 1937, Earhart and Noonan took off from Burbank, with Putnam and mechanic "Bo" McKneely onboard. One of the plane's engines caught fire when they landed in Tucson, Arizona, but it was quickly extinguished. The crew continued on to Miami without further incident, where final preparations for the round-the-world trip began.

One ongoing problem with the modern "flying laboratory" was its inadequate communication system. The Electra's 50-watt radio transmitter and receiver could only extend about 500 miles under normal conditions. It was also not powerful enough for direction finders located on the ground or on ships at sea to get a "fix" on the plane's location. The distance between New Guinea and Howland Island was 2,556 miles. Howland to Hawaii was another 1,940 miles. With few pieces of land in between these locations, some radio stations would clearly be more than 500 miles apart. A trailing wire at least 250 feet long would fill the communications gap.

Earhart was not fond of the solution, as it meant that she had to reel out the wire every time she was airborne, just as she was simultaneously flying the plane. Concerned about overloading the plane with too much weight, Earhart decided to remove the 250-foot trailing wire antenna. She also left behind the Morse key for the marine frequency radio

because she believed that she and Noonan could not operate a Morse code key quickly enough to justify carrying the extra weight. Instead, she would rely on voice broadcasts of her position at a daytime frequency of 6,210 kilocycles and nighttime frequency of 3,105 kilocycles.

## TAKING OFF AROUND THE WORLD

Five hundred people came out to see Earhart leave on her final flight. At 5:56 AM on June 1, 1937, Earhart and Noonan took off from Miami on the first leg of their long voyage. Before leaving, she told reporter Carl Allen, “As far as I know, I’ve got only one obsession—a small and probably feminine horror of growing old—so I won’t feel completely cheated if I fail to come back.”

The silver *Electra* arrived in Puerto Rico, its first stop, in time for lunch 1,000 miles later. The next day the flying duo awakened at 4 AM and headed to South America. Although Noonan had flown this route before as a navigator with Pan American, it was Earhart’s first experience flying over the jungle. The thought of an emergency landing in the tangle of brush made her shudder. Fortunately, she never had to find out. They stopped in Caripito, Venezuela, and Paramaibo (now Suriname). They made the first of three crossings of the equator on their way to Fortazela, Brazil, and a final refueling stop in Natal. The longest flight on that leg was from Paramaibo to Fortazela, when Earhart crossed 1,628 miles of jungle and ocean in 10 hours. Then they began their trans-Atlantic crossing to Africa.

Earhart was usually awake by 4 AM and averaged five hours of sleep a night. The *Electra* did not have an intercom system between pilot and navigator. During the flights, she and Noonan communicated by passing each other notes that were fastened to a fishing line and traveled from the cockpit to the table where Noonan worked out navigational calculations. While flying across the Atlantic, Earhart passed two Air France mail planes but wasn’t able to communicate with either one because they were equipped with a telegraph code key only. This system was considered more reliable than the microphone voice transmission system aboard the *Electra*.

Earhart arrived in French West Africa (now Senegal) in late afternoon on June 7, after flying for 13 hours and 22 minutes. She flew to Gao (Mali) three days later, covering 1,140 miles in less than eight hours. Drums of fuel with her name on them waited for her there. Then she flew over the Sahara to Fort Lamy (now N’Djamena) in Chad, on to

El Fasher in Sudan and Aseh in Ethiopia. The stops allowed Earhart to refuel the plane and check her equipment.

On June 15, Earhart crossed the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea to Karachi, Pakistan. The 2,000-mile flight was completed in 13 hours and 20 minutes. Putnam phoned his wife from New York, 8,274 miles away, to see how she was doing. She and Noonan enjoyed some leisure time, taking two camel rides during their two days in Karachi, before they flew on to Calcutta, traveling through monsoons and air currents that pushed her plane up and down. She took off again from a waterlogged runway at Calcutta's Dum Dum Airport, and they managed to navigate through walls of water to reach the airport at Akyab. Then they flew blind through a downpour to Rangoon and on to Singapore.

By the time Earhart reached Bandoeng, Java (Bandung, Indonesia), she had flown 20,000 miles in more than 135 hours. It was from there that she spoke to her husband for what would be the last time. They planned to see each other again in California by the Fourth of July. At sundown on June 27, she landed at Koepang (Kupan) on Timor Island and reached Port Darwin, Australia, the next day. On June 29 Earhart and Noonan landed in Lae, New Guinea. They had covered 22,000 miles in nearly six weeks, made 30 stops in 19 countries on five continents, and crossed the equator three times. Yet the most dangerous part of the trip lay ahead.

In their longest stretch yet, they would be flying over the Pacific Ocean for 2,556 miles to Howland Island without touching down. There were no landmarks and few islands to guide them. Howland, which was so tiny that it would be a challenge to find, was located in the middle of the Pacific nearly halfway between Honolulu and Australia. The island is two miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide and has a maximum elevation of 25 feet. The Coast Guard cutter *Itasca* was sent from San Diego, and it anchored off Howland on June 23, 1937, to guide Earhart and Noonan. The *Ontario* was stationed between Lae and Howland, and the *Swan* was stationed halfway between Howland and Honolulu.

Once Earhart was more than 500 miles from Lae, she would no longer be able to contact New Guinea by radio. She would have to stay on course throughout the night before she could use signals from the *Itasca* to get a radio bearing on Howland Island and land the Electra. The 250-foot trailing wire antenna that she had left behind in Miami would have allowed her to communicate with the *Itasca* from much farther away than the loop antenna on the Electra allowed.



Another issue was that Noonan had developed problems calibrating his chronometers, which meant that he would need to rely on star sights for celestial navigation. They needed clear weather to allow him to take readings from the sun during the day and the stars at night. An error of one degree in following the compass could take them off course by as much as 40 miles. Mother Nature was not on their side either. Weather reports called for headwinds of 20 to 30 knots, rain squalls, and overcast skies. This would make it difficult—if not impossible—to take celestial readings. To compound the problem, the government maps that Clarence Williams had used to plot Earhart's course were inaccurate and placed Howland seven miles northwest of its actual location.

William K. Thompson, commander of the *Itasca*, provided Earhart with weather reports for Australia and New Guinea and across the Pacific to the American west coast. However, he needed to know when and how she planned to communicate with his ship after she left Lae. He forwarded a message to her in Lae asking what frequencies she preferred to use and at what intervals she would be communicating.

Earhart replied asking for high frequencies of up to 7,500 kilocycles on voice. Thompson did not realize that she had left her Morse key transmitter and her antenna to receive 500 kilocycles or less in Miami. He informed her that the *Itasca's* transmitters were calibrated for 3,105, 500, and 425 on voice. They would only be able to communicate on 3,105 without her antenna, and this was not a reliable range to send and receive at dawn, just before the change from nighttime to daytime frequencies. In addition, the ship's direction finder only worked from 550 to 270. Thompson wasn't aware that these signals were of too low a frequency for the *Electra* to receive and then locate the ship.

## HEADED TO HOWLAND ISLAND

Earhart took off from Lae, New Guinea, on July 2 at 10:22 AM. She had 1,150 gallons of fuel onboard, which was enough to fly 4,000 miles under ideal conditions. The airport's radio operator Harry Balfour remained in touch with her for the next seven hours. She radioed her position at 5:20 PM, and that was the last contact he had. The *Electra* was expected to pass over the *Ontario*, in an area where the weather was good until nightfall, but a severe squall hit that lasted until dawn. Three men on the ship kept watch for the *Electra* while the radio operator stood by, but nothing more was heard from Earhart again until after midnight on Howland.

The men aboard the *Itasca* waited for word from the *Electra*. At 2:45 AM, they picked up a message from Earhart for the first time, but they were unable to establish communication. They continued to give her weather reports by Morse key on 7,500 (unaware that she could not receive their transmissions) and by voice on 3,105. At 3:30 AM, they asked for her position and her estimated arrival time on Howland. Her message 15 minutes later included neither. The *Itasca* radio operator tried again on 3,105 at 4 AM “What is your position? When do you expect to arrive in Howland? We are receiving your signals.” A garbled response arrived nearly an hour later.

At 6:15 AM Earhart called in on schedule and requested a bearing on 3,105 kilocycles. She estimated that she was about 200 miles from Howland Island. She whistled into her microphone, but it was difficult to distinguish the sound from that of Pacific radio reception at dawn. Radio operator Frank Cipriani could not get a “fix” on her location to let her know precisely where Howland was in relation to the *Electra*.

Half an hour later, Earhart asked that *Itasca* take a bearing on them and said that she was about 100 miles out. She made noise in her microphone and reception was clear, but she was on the air too briefly for the direction finder to get a bearing on the *Electra*. At 7:18 AM they broadcast to her by voice on 3,105. “Cannot take bearing on 3,105 very good. Please send on 500 (kilocycles) or do you wish to take bearing on us?” There was no answer.

At 7:42 AM, Earhart called in. “We must be on you but cannot see you, but gas is running low,” she said. “Been unable reach you by radio. We are flying at altitude 1,000 feet.” The *Itasca*’s operators confirmed on radio frequencies 3,105 and 500 that they had received her last message. They heard her voice again a minute later. “Earhart calling *Itasca*,” she said. “We are circling but cannot hear you. Go ahead on 7,500 either now or on schedule time on half hour.”

At 8 AM the *Itasca* sent out a long series of signals to help the *Electra* get a bearing. “We are receiving your signals but are unable to get a minimum (for a bearing),” Earhart said. “Please take a bearing on us and answer with voice on 3,105.” She had now been in the air for 20 hours. In none of her messages did she provide her position, her course, her speed, or her estimated time of arrival, but she should have arrived on Howland by now.

The *Itasca* could not take a bearing on 3,105 because its direction finder worked only up to 500 kilocycles. The ship’s operators transmitted and listened on different wavelengths including 7,500, but to no avail.

Earhart's last message was heard at 8:44 AM on 3,105 kilocycles. "We are in a line of position 156-337. Will repeat message. We will repeat this message on 6,210 kilocycles. Wait. Listening on 6,210 kilocycles. We are running north and south."

The men on the *Itasca* knew that the situation was urgent. They replied immediately and continued to transmit and listen on all the frequencies they thought she might use. There was no response, however, only silence. Just 23 days before her fortieth birthday, Amelia Earhart was lost somewhere over an area of 450,000 square miles in the South Pacific on her final flight.

### SEARCH FOR THE ELECTRA

The *Itasca's* Commander Thompson estimated that the Electra should have enough fuel until noon, giving Earhart a few hours to look for a place to land. The cutter continued radio transmissions around the clock at 3,105, 6,210 and 500 kilocycles. At night, it set its searchlights against the sky. The ship searched an area of 9,500 square miles, hoping Earhart was either sitting on the wing of the floating Electra or in an emergency rubber raft, but there were no sign of her or her aircraft.

The U.S. Navy was determined to find the two fliers. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral William D. Leahy jumped into action. For 16 days, 10 ships and 65 planes combed more than 250,000 square miles of the Pacific for signs of Earhart, Noonan, and wreckage of the Electra. The battleship *Colorado* joined the search, traveling south and east of Howland through the Phoenix Islands. The *Itasca* and minesweeper *Swan* went north and west to the Gilbert Islands. On July 13, four destroyers arrived in the Howland area along with aircraft carrier *Lexington* and 63 aircraft. The planes logged 1,591 hours over a five-day search, but there were no signs of the Electra, the life raft, Earhart, or Noonan. On July 19, 1937, the Navy called off the search.

Earhart was declared legally dead 18 months after she disappeared, but rumors about her fate persisted. After 1945, there were stories that she had been on a secret spying mission for the United States and that the Japanese had captured and executed her. Another rumor was that she had flown off course and was still alive on a tiny Pacific Island. The myth about Earhart being captured by the Japanese during an American spy mission began with a 1943 Hollywood film *Flight to Freedom* starring Rosalind Russell. The heroine of the fictional story was a famous female pilot, clearly meant to be Earhart, who volunteers

for a secret mission. She deliberately gets lost during the Pacific flight to give the U.S. Navy a reason to search Japanese islands for suspected fortifications that they were not allowed to build as part of the League of Nations mandate.

Three years after the film appeared, Josephine Blanco said that a decade earlier, when she was 11 years old, she had seen an American woman pilot and a tall man on Saipan in the Marianas. Blanco was riding her bicycle toward Tanapag Harbor at about noon one day when she saw a silver plane crash-land in the harbor. “The American woman,” everyone said. At the time, the Japanese didn’t hesitate to shoot anyone that they believed was spying on them. A crowd gathered by the water as the short-haired woman flier and her male companion were led away by Japanese soldiers. The two were taken to a clearing and shot. However, it is most likely that Earhart ran out of fuel within 100 miles off tiny Howland Island and disappeared into the sea.

## FURTHER READING

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Lloyd Gaines fought for the right to attend law school alongside white students. AP Photo.

# The Case of the Missing Activist: Lloyd L. Gaines (1939)

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*The disappearance of activist Lloyd L. Gaines is emblematic of the racial tensions that were building in the United States, as African Americans were beginning to demand their civil rights.*

Twenty-four-year-old Lloyd Lionel Gaines wanted to attend law school—but not just any law school. It was 1935, and like all southern states Missouri made African Americans and whites attend separate schools. Gaines had just graduated from Lincoln University, a school for Negroes, but the gifted student wanted to attend the University of Missouri.

Gaines was born in 1911 in northern Mississippi, but in 1926 he moved to St. Louis with his siblings and widowed mother after his father passed away. He graduated first among his class of 50 students at Vashon High School in 1931 and was valedictorian. He also won a \$250 scholarship and was given the school's award for outstanding graduate of the year. He briefly attended Stowe Teacher's College before receiving a scholarship to attend Lincoln University in Jefferson City, where he became a member of the campus Alpha Phi Alpha social fraternity and president of the senior class. He worked during college to pay for his schooling and graduated in August 1935 with a bachelor's degree with honors in history.

Gaines wanted to be a lawyer, but Missouri's 36 African-American lawyers had all been educated in other states because Missouri's law school only admitted whites. The Supreme Court decision in 1896 in the case of *Plessy versus Ferguson* allowed states to operate separate but equal educational institutions for blacks, but there was a lack of graduate schools for blacks in Missouri. Therefore, the state paid the tuition for them to attend universities in other states, such as Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana.

Gaines applied to the University of Missouri and announced that he wanted to enter the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law. Officials were stunned at his audacity. In the institution's 96-year history, they had never admitted an African-American student—and it wasn't about to start now. His application for admission was rejected, with the university explaining that Missouri had a separate educational system for white and Negro students. A week later, they offered Gaines a scholarship to attend law school in another state, but that was not what he wanted. He saw no reason why he should be forced to leave home because of the color of his skin. Gaines appealed to the president of the University of Missouri but received no response.

Remaining steadfast in his belief that he was entitled to the same education as white students, Gaines refused the scholarship and insisted on his right to attend law school in Missouri. He received the support of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Led by Charles Hamilton Houston of the national NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Gaines went to court in January 1936 to fight for his rights. Houston was the first black editor of the *Harvard Law Review* and a former dean of the Howard University Law School.

Houston argued that refusing Gaines admission to the law school violated his client's rights under the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. Missouri had a law school for whites but none for blacks. In July 1936, a lower court upheld the university's decision to reject his application, but the young student was not daunted. The case was appealed to the Missouri Supreme Court, which upheld the lower court's decision in December 1937.

An appeal was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court on November 9, 1938. In a historic decision made on December 12, 1938, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in a vote of six to two to overturn the decisions of the lower courts. Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes pointed out that refusing to admit Gaines to the state law school when Missouri did not have a "separate but equal" law school for blacks violated the rights of Lloyd Gaines. "The basic consideration here is not as to what sort of opportunities other states provide, or whether they are as good as those in Missouri, but as to what opportunities Missouri itself furnishes to white students and denies to Negroes solely upon the ground of color." He believed that "that petitioner was entitled to be admitted to the law school of the State University in the absence of other and proper provision for his legal training within the State," he ruled.

The Supreme Court reversed the Missouri court decisions and said that the state was required to provide equal facilities for blacks. Specifically, they found that Gaines was qualified to enter the University of Missouri's Law School and that Missouri could not shift to another state its constitutional duty to provide equal educational opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their race. The court declared that paying for African-American students from Missouri to attend law schools outside the state violated the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause. In a vote of six to two, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered Missouri to admit Lloyd Gaines to its state university or give him legal training at Lincoln University.



Meanwhile, the man at the center of the controversy had been attending business school at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. He received a master's degree in economics in 1937 and joined the Michigan State Civil Service Department. Gaines was pleased with the outcome of the court case. He returned to St. Louis, and he publicly stated that he planned to enter the University of Missouri Law School the following September. "I have been given the right to enter Missouri University in September, and I have every intention of exercising that privilege," he said in a speech given on January 8, 1939, to an audience at the Pine Street YMCA. Privately, however, he wasn't so sure that he wanted to continue. Despite having two degrees, Gaines had difficulty landing a job in St. Louis. He worked briefly as a gas station attendant until he discovered that his boss was shortchanging customers with lesser-quality gas at a premium price.

Would the university admit Gaines to the University of Missouri's law school or would the state legislature authorize a law program at Lincoln University? These seemed to be the only options. The week that the Supreme Court ruling was handed down, the *New York Times* made its own prediction. "It is unlikely the doors of the State school will be opened to [Gaines] to shatter a ninety-nine year precedent," it said in an editorial. The newspaper was right.

## LAW SCHOOL FOR BLACKS

In mid-January 1939, Democratic Representative John D. Taylor of the Missouri General Assembly introduced a bill that granted Lincoln University "equal status" with the University of Missouri and called for \$275,000 to establish a law school at Lincoln University. The same bill, which subsequently passed, gave the University of Missouri \$3 million. Governor Lloyd C. Stark signed the bill into law on May 4, 1939, and Lincoln University Law School opened in St. Louis in September 1939 with 30 students. It was housed in a former beauty college, and Lloyd Gaines was not among the school's students. The NAACP did not believe that the new law school was on par with that of the University of Missouri's. During a hearing in Boone County Circuit Court on October 7, 1939, Gaines was conspicuously absent.

Gaines had left St. Louis to speak to the NAACP branch in Kansas City on February 20, 1939. The following day, he boarded a train bound for Chicago, where he planned to spend a few days before returning to St. Louis. He stayed at the YMCA on Wabash Avenue and then at the

Alpha Phi Alpha house, a chapter of his Lincoln University fraternity. He was having financial difficulties, and his fraternity brothers reportedly took up a collection to help.

He mailed his mother Callie an eight-page letter from Chicago on March 3, 1939. Three years of fighting for his rights appeared to have taken a toll. “As for my publicity relative to the university case, I have found that my race still likes to applaud, shake hands, pat me on the back and say how great and noble is the idea; how historic and socially important the case but—and there it ends,” he said. “Off and out of the confines of the publicity columns I am just a man—not one who has sacrificed to make the case possible; one who is still fighting and sacrificing—almost the ‘supreme sacrifice’ to see that it is a complete and lasting success for thirteen million Negroes. No! just another man. Sometimes I wish I were just a plain, ordinary man whose name no one recognized.” The letter ended with, “Should I forget to write for a time don’t worry about it. I can look after myself.—As ever, Lloyd.”

On the evening of March 19, 1939, Gaines put on his coat and told the housekeeper at the Chicago fraternity house that he was going out to buy some stamps. He was never seen or heard from again. All that remained was a small duffel bag of clothing, and his disappearance went largely unnoticed for at least several weeks. It was not until October that it became public.

## DISAPPEARANCE

Some people suggested that he was the victim of foul play at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan, while others wondered if he had simply chosen to live a quiet life under a new identity, perhaps in self-imposed exile in Mexico. Members of his family thought he was alive and living under an assumed name. His body has never been found. He had vanished without a trace. According to Federal Bureau of Investigation records obtained by wire service Associated Press, an internal memo dated May 10, 1940, and signed by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, stated that agents were not investigating the case. He denied another request in May 1970 to investigate, claiming that the case was not within the FBI’s jurisdiction.

Without a plaintiff, the case challenging the notion that the new law school was on par with that of the University of Missouri would not be able to continue. It was dropped on January 2, 1940, after Gaines’s lawyers were unable to find him. He never had the opportunity to benefit

from becoming the first black man to be admitted to the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law.

However, his fight had important implications for segregation. It paved the way for *Brown v. Board of Education*, a landmark 1954 case that led to the outlaw of segregation in public education. A 1944 poll of University of Missouri students found that 60 percent were in favor of admitting Negro students to the school's undergraduate and professional programs such as law. University officials finally conceded, and the first African-American students were admitted in the fall of 1950.

### ADMITTED IN ABSENTIA

In 1993, Missouri University Law School admitted Gaines in absentia—nearly 60 years after he first applied. In the spring of 2006, Missouri awarded him an honorary law degree posthumously and the Missouri Bar Association granted him honorary admission. His nephew, retired U.S. Navy officer George Gaines, gave the commencement speech. “A major part of the dream of Lloyd Gaines, to have a law degree from the University of Missouri, has been fulfilled today,” he said. A scholarship was also established in his name.

The Black Culture Center was renamed the Lloyd L. Gaines-Marian O’Fallon Oldham Black Culture Center in 2001. In 1977, Oldham, an educator, became the first African-American woman to be named to the university’s board of curators. She served for eight years.

In 2007, the FBI said that it would reopen unsolved murders connected with civil rights cases if it were still possible to prosecute the offenders. Officials acknowledged that a number of the murders were either not investigated, not properly investigated, went unreported, or were incorrectly identified as an accidental death or disappearance. They identified more than 100 cases from 1952 to 1968 for review, which prompted the NAACP to ask the FBI to investigate Gaines’s disappearance even though it fell outside the time period that the agency was examining. The FBI agreed to consider reopening the case.

Gaines’s nephew, George Gaines, told a reporter that he hoped that reopening the case might shed some light on his uncle’s disappearance, but he knew it was a long shot. “Time itself would suggest that the longer you are away from the event, the likelihood of solving it becomes worse and worse, but it might shed some light on it,” he said. The Gaines family never declared him legally dead, but in November 1999 an engraved memorial headstone was placed for Gaines at Saint Peter’s

Cemetery in Missouri. A plaque and portrait at the School of Law remind students of his landmark struggle—and his equally mysterious disappearance.

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American millionaire and philanthropist Sir Harry Oakes was a fixture in the Bahamas after moving there from Canada. Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

# Millionaire Murder: The Case of Sir Harry Oakes (1943)

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*The murder of Sir Harry Oakes marked the first time that fingerprint evidence was introduced at a trial in the Bahamas. It highlighted just how important it is for investigators to ensure that these forensic techniques are used correctly in order for the resulting evidence to stand up to scrutiny in court.*

Harry Oakes was attending Syracuse Medical School in New York when news of the 1896 Klondike gold strike in Canada's Yukon Territory made headlines around the world. It fired up his imagination. He abandoned medical school after his second year and headed to the Klondike, but it would take many years of prospecting in Alaska, Australia, New Zealand, and California before Oakes struck gold in Canada.

Oakes had just left California and headed north with only \$2.65 in his pocket when he heard about yet another gold strike. This time, it was in a small community called Swastika, Ontario, Canada. Working with partners, he and the group finally struck gold at Kirkland Lake, Ontario, in January 1912. Their find turned the partners into wealthy men, but Oakes sold his share after problems developed between him and his partners. He began digging for gold on his own beneath Kirkland Lake itself. His company, Lake Shore Mines, became one of the largest gold producers in the Western Hemisphere, and by 1918 it was making an estimated \$60,000 a day at a time when most men made \$1,000 a year. Oakes became the richest man in Canada and built a mansion overlooking the Lake Shore Mine and a private golf course.

Oakes was on a world cruise in 1923 when, at the age of 48, he met and fell in love with 24-year-old Eunice MacIntyre, who was traveling to England from her native Australia. The couple married in Sydney, Australia, on June 30, 1923, and settled in Kirkland Lake. They had three sons and two daughters. The following year, Oakes gave up his American citizenship and became Canadian, but Canada's rising income taxes made Oakes unhappy with his adopted home.

During a trip to Palm Beach, Florida, prominent Bahamian real estate agent Harold Christie told Oakes that the Bahamas had no taxes. The millionaire moved his family to Nassau in the late 1930s and became a Bahamian citizen. His wealthy neighbors and acquaintances included the Duke of Windsor, who had become the governor of the Bahamas after renouncing the British throne in 1936 to marry American divorcée Wallis Simpson.

Oakes built himself several large homes, the British Colonial Hotel, and a beachfront golf course and also launched an upscale country club

and his own airline. The construction boom that he created made him powerful because it generated jobs and resulted in higher wages locally. Oakes also built a new wing for the Nassau children's hospital, gave free transportation to his employees for their work commute, and provided milk to their children. His generosity landed him a knighthood from King George VI in 1939.

Shortly after Oakes's eldest daughter Nancy turned 18, she secretly married 33-year-old Count Marie Alfred Fouquereaux de Marigny on May 19, 1942. She had met the twice-divorced native of Mauritius at a dance in Nassau where they both lived. de Marigny, who preferred the nickname "Freddie," was known for his playboy lifestyle; he owned a racing yacht called *Concubine*.

Oakes and his wife were not pleased about their new son-in-law, but they did their best to accept him. de Marigny's lifestyle, however, would become a source of conflict with Oakes and lead to a public spat. Tension ran high, and this drove a wedge between Nancy and her parents. She wrote a letter to her mother on May 26, 1943, insisting that her husband be accepted as a member of the family. If she had to choose between her husband and her mother, she would choose her husband, she said.

Less than two months later, July 7, 1943, dawned a hot and humid day. Lady Oakes was at the family home in Bar Harbor, Maine, to escape the stifling heat. Their children were traveling, de Marigny was busy at his new chicken farm, and Sir Harry planted trees on his estate near the Bahamas Country Club in Nassau that afternoon. Then he made a date with Harold Christie and newspaper editor Etienne Dupuch to see his 1,500 newly arrived sheep. He also confirmed plans to play golf with the Duke of Windsor the following day. Oakes intended to join his wife in Bar Harbor on July 9.

Oakes played tennis with Christie at 5 PM before they went back to his home (called Westbourne) for cocktails and dinner. Retired Woolworth's executive Charles Hubbard and Englishwoman Dulcibelle Henneage joined them. Christie's niece Sally Sawyer and her friend came for cocktails but left before dinner. The rest of the guests stayed and played Chinese checkers after supper. Hubbard drove Henneage home at about 11 PM.

Christie and Oakes stayed up and chatted for another half hour. The multimillionaire miner was reading a newspaper in his bedroom when Christie went to the guestroom that separated Sir Harry's by another bedroom and a bathroom. Christie climbed into bed and read a copy of *Time* magazine for another half hour before he turned out the light



and went to sleep. He was wakened only by the sound of buzzing mosquitoes and a fierce rainstorm with high winds and blowing rain that passed through Nassau in the early hours of July 8. Christie later said that he didn't hear anything unusual during the night.

## MURDER IN THE BAHAMAS

At 7 AM Christie woke up and noticed that Oakes was not on the balcony where he normally ate his breakfast. He went to the door of Sir Harry's bedroom. "Hi Harry," he said, but there was no response. Christie opened the door and stepped inside. Oakes was lying on his back, sprawled diagonally across his bed. His skull had been fractured by an object that left four triangular indentations around his left ear. Blood had dripped across his face. His mosquito net, bedding, and pajamas were charred, and feathers from a pillow clung to his partly burned body. An electric fan sat on the floor beside the bed.

In the predawn hours of July 8, 1943, Sir Harry had been brutally murdered in his bedroom. He had been lying facedown when he was struck, but either rolled over or someone turned him onto his back. The killer had doused the body, bed, mosquito netting, rugs, and curtains with gasoline, hoping to destroy evidence of the crime, but the rainstorm had blown through the room's screens and doused the fire, which hadn't spread much beyond the bed. A partly burned ornate, lacquered Chinese screen near the bed had fingerprints and was splattered with blood. There was a single bloody handprint on the wall beside Sir Harry's bed about four feet from the floor. In addition, mud, sand, and footprints were found on the stairs leading up to the bedroom.

When Christie found his friend's smoldering body, he grabbed a pillow from another bed and placed it under Sir Harry's head, and then he took water from a thermos bottle that stood on the bedside table and poured it into his friend's mouth. He wet a towel and wiped Oakes's face, hoping to revive him. Christie thought that the mining tycoon was still alive, so he rushed out onto the balcony and shouted for help, but Oakes, at age 68, was dead.

Christie phoned his brother Frank and reported the murder, and then he rushed back to his room to wipe the blood off his hands with his own towel. Frank Christie called a doctor, who pronounced Oakes dead. While Harold Christie waited for the police to arrive, *Nassau Tribune* editor Etienne Dupuch phoned the house to confirm the day's appointment with Oakes. That's when he learned that the man was dead.

The Duke of Windsor took charge when he learned of the murder. As governor of the island, he imposed a press blackout about news of the killing, but it was too late. Dupuch was a local correspondent for news agencies around the world, and he had already sent out the information. Journalists from media outlets including the *New York Daily News* and the *Miami Herald* were soon on their way to cover what was described as “the story of the century.” The murder would soon displace headlines about World War II, which was raging in Europe.

The duke decided not to rely on the local police or Scotland Yard to investigate the murder. Instead, he called in two detectives from the Miami Police Department. Homicide investigator Edward Melchen, 50, worked for the Homicide Bureau and had served as the duke’s bodyguard during a visit to Miami. Fingerprints and identification expert James Barker, 40, was supervisor of the Police Criminal Laboratories in Miami. Although the duke was informed that Oakes had been murdered, he told the detectives that he wanted them to confirm the details of a suicide. The two men arrived in Nassau on July 8. They examined the scene and decided from blood-flow patterns that Oakes had been lying facedown when he was hit in the head. This was clearly not a suicide.

## INVESTIGATION

Barker announced that it was too humid to lift fingerprints, so he took prints the following day when it was drier. However, he had forgotten to bring the camera that he normally used to photograph latent fingerprints before lifting them and made no effort to have it sent to him. The camera was used to take a picture of the fingerprint on the object in question, to prove where it was found. This was done before the fingerprint was lifted. Other problems developed. Over the next two days, locals were allowed into the mansion and handled pieces of evidence without any restrictions. The crime scene was contaminated.

de Marigny was called to the mansion for questioning. He told detectives that his wife was in the United States and that he had raced his yacht the *Concubine* the day before the murder. Then he had changed into fresh clothes at home and had gone to the Prince George Hotel to join friends Freddie Ceretta, Dorothy Clark, and Jean Ainslie, the wives of air force officers stationed locally. de Marigny invited them over to his home for dinner, along with Oswald Moseley, Basil McKinney, Georges de Visdelou, and Betty Roberts. de Marigny drove Clark and Ainslie home at 1:30 AM and returned to his own house. The two women

corroborated his story. As police were interrogating him, de Marigny sipped a glass of water beside him.

Detectives performed a heat test and noticed that there were no signs of burns on Christie, but under a microscope they found signs of scorching on de Marigny's beard, the hair on the back of one of his hands, a forearm, and his head. That fuelled their suspicions that he was the killer. His very public spat with the victim gave him a motive. Police believed that de Marigny had killed Oakes because of a conflict between the two men over his marriage to Nancy. Then there was the fingerprint that Barker said he found on the Chinese screen in Sir Harry's bedroom.

## ARREST

On July 9 at 6 PM, de Marigny was arrested and charged with murder. He asked police to call renowned criminal lawyer Alfred Adderley on his behalf, as de Marigny wanted to avail himself of the services of the best defense lawyer in the Bahamas. Adderley never received the message, however, and instead the sought-after lawyer was hired by the Crown to help the prosecution's case. de Marigny was jailed until his trial. After word of the arrest got out, a crowd assembled outside the jail. Locals were fond of the generous Oakes, and the Duke of Windsor was afraid that the mob would turn ugly. He called the fire brigade to turn the hoses on the crowd if the situation turned violent, but the crowd dispersed.

Upon hearing of her father's murder, Nancy Oakes de Marigny rushed from Bennington, Vermont, to Bar Harbor, Maine, to wait with her mother for his body to be returned to the family. Oakes, who was born in Sangerville, Maine, two days before Christmas in 1873, was buried in Bar Harbor, Maine, on July 15, 1943. His daughter then hired private investigator Raymond Schindler to clear her husband's name. Schindler, in turn, recruited Professor Leonard Keeler of the Northwestern University Crime Laboratory. Keeler was one of the inventors of the polygraph machine.

When Schindler and Keeler arrived at the Oakes estate in Nassau, they found the police scrubbing the walls of the bedroom, removing all the forensic evidence in the process. The Miami detectives had told local police to wash away the handprints and fingerprints that they considered unimportant to their investigation. The evidence could be cleaned off, they explained, because those prints did not match those of the accused. The bloody handprint that had been found beside Oakes's bed was already gone, and its owner would never be identified.

Barker took photos of the scene, including the handprint, but the negatives were mysteriously destroyed by exposure to light at a developer's lab in Miami before they could be seen. Schindler suspected that there was an official cover-up behind the death to frame de Marigny and protect the real killer. The detective's telephone line in Nassau was bugged. When he pretended to arrange a meeting with a supposed informant, two carloads of policemen turned up at the location and scoured the scene. However, Schindler and Keeler never identified a suspect in the Oakes murder.

Meanwhile, lawyers were preparing to plead de Marigny's case in court. The Crown's evidence rested largely on a fingerprint and the singed hairs. The preliminary investigation in Magistrates' Court opened a week after de Marigny's arrest. It was repeatedly adjourned, and dragged on into August. A trial date was set for the fall. Dr. Ulrich Oberwarth checked de Marigny for burn marks or signs of singeing to the arms, hands, body, and beard, but found nothing. He later admitted that he had not used a microscope the way the Miami detectives had.

## DE MARIGNY ON TRIAL

In the hours before the trial opened on October 18, 1943, in Bahamian Supreme Court, members of the public lined up outside to make sure that they managed to get a seat to watch the proceedings. Throughout the duration of the trial, people from Nassau crowded into the courtroom each day to watch the case, sometimes sitting two to a seat. They brought sandwiches to munch on while they watched the courtroom drama unfold. Newspapers and wire services sent reporters from the United States to cover the sensational case.

The case was heard before Sir Oscar Daly, Chief Justice of the Bahamas. Attorney General Eric Halliman led for the Crown, assisted by Sir Alfred Adderley—the very lawyer that de Marigny had tried to hire when he was first arrested. Godfrey Higgs led de Marigny's defense team. De Marigny sat in the prisoner's box and pleaded not guilty to the charges against him.

Harold Christie testified that on the night of July 7, 1943, Oakes had entertained several guests, including two neighbors, until about 11 p.m. Christie and Oakes continued to chat and then they went to bed half an hour later. Christie found Oakes's body the next morning. Higgs suggested that Christie might be the murderer.

Captain Edward Sears was superintendent of the Bahamas Police Force. He said that he had seen Christie riding through downtown

Nassau at midnight on July 8 in a station wagon driven by an unknown person. He believed that the vehicle had come from the Nassau waterfront. A night watchman had said that he saw a powerboat offloading two men that night, 13 miles from Oakes's residence. The nocturnal activity was an unusual occurrence. The men later returned and were taken away by boat. However, jurors never heard the watchman's story, as the defense was informed that the witness had reportedly drowned before the trial. The spot where Sears had seen Christie was directly on the route between Oakes's Westbourne home and Prince George's wharf, where the boat that was said to have left two men would have been moored. Christie owned a station wagon, but he claimed that he never left the house the night of the murder.

Dr. Laurence Fitzmaurice had performed the autopsy. He said that a heavy blunt object had been used to crack Oakes's skull and left triangular shaped wounds. Defense witness Dr. Hugh Quackenbush estimated the time of death at between 2 AM and 5 AM. He pointed out that the mattress was still smoldering when he examined Oakes on the morning of July 8, 1943.

Then the Crown presented their key witnesses, detectives Barker and Melchen, but the case did not go as planned. They couldn't seem to agree on just when they became aware of de Marigny's fingerprints at the crime scene. Barker said that he found them on July 9. At a preliminary hearing, Melchen had said that he wasn't aware of the match until July 19 or 20. During the trial he said that Barker didn't mention it until Oakes was buried on July 15. Melchen also first testified that he interviewed de Marigny between 3 PM and 4 PM on July 9. Two Bahamian police officers corroborated the story, but a police lieutenant swore that de Marigny had left the interview at 2 PM. Melchen said under oath that he had made a mistake, but he did not explain why two police officers supported the first version of his story. Was it really an error?

Melchen also said that Sir Harry had staggered into the hall before being dragged back to his room. When medical evidence indicated that Oakes never got out of bed, Melchen retracted his story. He confessed that he had not analyzed the material that was used to light the fire in the bedroom. He also failed to measure some handprints on the wall of the victim's bedroom.

Then Captain Barker took the stand. As his testimony progressed, it became apparent that the supervisor of the Police Criminal Lab in Miami had done a less than stellar job. Fingerprints are normally dusted

with powder, photographed, and then lifted with cellophane tape. This process preserves the latent print at the scene. Barker had used a rubber gum to lift the print, which removed it entirely from the original surface. He also admitted that he did not think he had dusted the thermos or the water glass or the lampshade in Oakes's bedroom, nor the stairway in the hall.

In what was the first time that a fingerprint was introduced into evidence in the Bahamas, questions arose as to when de Marigny's fingerprint was lifted from the Chinese screen beside Sir Harry's bed. Was it before he was interrogated in the house or after? Police officers agreed that it was done before de Marigny had access to the room, but discrepancies about the timing of de Marigny's interrogation cast suspicion on Barker's story. Once the correct time was established, it became clear that it was possible for de Marigny to have touched the Chinese screen the day that he was questioned rather than during the murder.

Barker also had difficulty remembering from which spot on the Chinese screen he had lifted the print. The defense team alleged that the print came from the water glass de Marigny was handed when he was interrogated at Westbourne—and not from the screen. Higgs claimed that Barker didn't find de Marigny's fingerprint at the scene. He merely lifted it from a water glass after the police interrogation and *claimed* to have found it at the scene. Barker's credibility was destroyed.

Dorothy Clark and Jean Ainslie each took the stand for the defense. They testified that de Marigny drove them home at 1:30 AM in the early hours of July 8. De Marigny told the court that he went straight home afterwards. He explained that he had burned his beard and forearms while lighting a candle. In his closing arguments, Higgs accused witnesses for the prosecution of perjury. The Miami detectives had either seriously bungled the case or destroyed some evidence and fabricated other evidence in an effort to frame de Marigny.

The jury began deliberating on November 1, 1943, after a two-week trial. Less than two hours later, they acquitted de Marigny. He was jubilant. The threat of the hangman's noose had been lifted. The jury also recommended that the Mauritian-born de Marigny be deported from the island. Lieutenant-Colonel R. A. Erskine-Lindop was the Bahamian police commissioner when Oakes was murdered. When he had refused to charge de Marigny, the Duke of Windsor transferred him to Trinidad and kept him there until the end of the trial. That made him unavailable to testify for the defense. Eight years later, Erskine-Lindop

told a journalist that “a suspect in the case broke down under cross-examination.” He did not name the person, but he did say that the killer continued “to move about in high society” after the trial.

### WHY WAS OAKES MURDERED?

After the acquittal, Bahamian authorities did not spend much time pursuing the investigation further. U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt offered the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s services to help solve the case, but the Duke of Windsor refused the offer. Schindler’s proposal to assist in an investigation was also rebuffed. De Marigny left the island, and his marriage to Nancy Oakes was later annulled.

To this day, rumors persist that Harry Oakes was murdered because of gambling interests. Gambling was illegal in the Bahamas at the time. The mob, led by gangster Meyer Lansky, wanted to build large hotels and casinos on the island to generate money and attract tourists by the plane and boatload. They had just done that in Cuba, but government instability there and more difficult access to that island made that operation less profitable. The mob believed that the proximity of the Bahamas to the United States would bring in more money. The two powerful Bahamians who would need to be convinced before this could happen were the Duke of Windsor and Sir Harry Oakes. Christie, ever a booster of the Bahamas, had access to both men. He supported the development of the island’s tourism industry through hotels, reliable transportation, and casinos.

A man called Frank Marshall had approached Christie and said that he represented a group of American businessmen. The “businessmen” included gangsters Meyer Lansky and Charles “Lucky” Luciano. The duke had already allowed gambling on the island for a limited part of the year. It is possible that Oakes may have opposed the idea because he didn’t need the money that the influx of tourists would generate, and he would have more to lose from sharing his island. However, the only person who knew for sure is the one who murdered the mining millionaire.

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# Georgette Bauerdorf: The Mysterious Death of an Oil Executive's Daughter (1944)

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*The little-known murder of Georgette Bauerdorf, shortly before that of better-known Elizabeth Short, is shrouded in as much mystery today as it was when it happened.*

Twenty-year-old Georgette Bauerdorf enjoyed a shopping trip and lunch with her father's secretary, Rose L. Gilbert. The two said goodbye at about 2 PM on October 11, 1944. Heiress Bauerdorf was the daughter of New York financier George Bauerdorf, who had oil and mining interests in Louisiana, Texas, and Nevada. She had been schooled in a convent in Long Island, New York, and then graduated from a girls' school. Her father, stepmother, and sister, 21-year-old Constance Bauerdorf Dillon, had left for New York at the end of August. Georgette was now living alone in the family's apartment in Los Angeles.

She was a junior hostess at the Hollywood Canteen. Actress Bette Davis, John Garfield, and Jules Stein opened the club on October 3, 1942, for servicemen who were in the Hollywood area. Members of Hollywood's professional trades helped convert the former barn on Cahuenga Boulevard off the Sunset Strip, and young women volunteered as junior hostesses to dance with servicemen.

It was on the evening of June 13, 1944, that she met Private Jerome M. Brown, an anti-aircraft artillery trainee from Chicago who was stationed at Camp Callan, California. He left California soon afterwards and arrived at Fort Bliss in Texas on June 29. The two wrote to each other, and Brown received six letters from her in the ensuing months.

Four months after they first met, Bauerdorf cashed a check for \$175 and used \$90 of it to buy an airline ticket to attend Brown's graduation from army school in El Paso, Texas. She told close friends that she was going to meet her "soldier boyfriend." She planned to meet her beau on October 14, 1944. Hours after meeting her father's secretary for lunch, Bauerdorf left her apartment and went to the Hollywood Canteen.

Her role as a junior hostess was to dance with the soldiers, but one man that her friend and fellow hostess June Zeigler, 20, later described as "swarthy," insisted on cutting in on nearly every dance that Bauerdorf had that evening. He wanted to jitterbug, a dance that was of little interest to her. She danced at the club until about 11:15 PM and returned home alone.

As she stood in her kitchen, Bauerdorf pulled out cutlery and dishes and cracked open a can of string beans. She then polished off her midnight snack with half a cantaloupe. Janitor Fred Atwood awoke to the sound

of a woman's heels clicking back and forth on Bauerdorf's kitchen floor. He heard a crash, as though someone had dropped a tray on the floor, and then he went back to sleep. Bauerdorf tossed the empty can and melon rinds into the kitchen wastebasket, washed up her dishes, and went to the bedroom upstairs to get ready for bed.

## **BODY IN THE BATHTUB**

Anguished screams for help woke up a neighbor at about 2:30 AM. He sat bolt upright in bed and listened as he heard Bauerdorf yell, "Stop, stop, you're killing me!" The screams seemed to quiet down, and suddenly it went silent. Being sleepy and thinking that it was just a family squabble, he went back to sleep without investigating.

The next morning, janitor Atwood and his wife Paula were making the rounds, cleaning tenants' apartments at the upscale building that was home to some celebrities. They arrived at Bauerdorf's door at 11:10 AM and entered her apartment. It was quiet. Moments later, they found her nearly nude body lying face down in the bathtub.

The couple called the police, who arrived on the scene and began searching the apartment for clues about who and what killed Bauerdorf. The place was a mess, with clothing and many of her personal possessions scattered around, but nothing appeared to have been stolen. There was jewelry on the dresser, along with her plane ticket to Texas. A large roll of \$2 bills and sterling silver worth thousands of dollars lay in plain view in an open trunk.

There were bloodstains on a rug in the bedroom adjoining the bathroom. An attempt had apparently been made to clean them up. Bauerdorf had a bloody nose, and police initially thought that this could account for the bloodstains. Inspector William J. Penprase of the Sheriff's Department took charge of the investigation, and his preliminary assessment was that she had been knocked unconscious after falling and had drowned.

An autopsy the following day indicated otherwise. Dr. Frank R. Webb, chief county autopsy surgeon, reported that Bauerdorf had been raped. She was then suffocated when someone forced a piece of folded washcloth down her throat. There was evidence that she had fought and struggled against her attacker. The knuckles of her right hand were smashed and bruised, and there was a bruise on the right side of her head that could have been caused by being punched. Another bruise appeared

on her abdomen, and her right thigh bore the bruised imprint of a hand, even indicating fingernail marks piercing the skin. Webb fixed the time of death at between 2 AM and 3 AM, which was consistent with a neighbor hearing her screaming and pleading for her life at 2:30 AM.

## POLICE INVESTIGATION

Police found more clues indicating signs of foul play. The automatic night light over the outside entrance of her apartment had been unscrewed just enough to turn it off permanently without using a switch. It had been deliberately tampered with to either prevent Bauerdorf from seeing who was at her door or to shield her killer's identity when he left. Since the light was nearly eight feet off the floor, the assailant likely stood on a chair or another piece of furniture to reach it. He went to considerable effort to make sure that the front of her apartment was dark. Police found fingerprints on the lightbulb.

Investigators believed that Bauerdorf's killer either used a key to enter her apartment or waited downstairs until she got ready for bed. Then he rang the doorbell, lured her to the door, and overpowered her once he was inside. Although her body showed signs of trying to fight off her attacker, there was nothing inside the apartment indicating any signs of a struggle.

After leaving her body in the bathtub, Bauerdorf's killer took nearly \$100 from her purse and then grabbed her car keys before he fled. The 1936 model Coupe registered in her sister Connie's name had been taken from the apartment building's garage. Police found it the following day in the southern part of Los Angeles, 12 miles from her fashionable West Hollywood home. Her killer had ditched it when it ran out of gas.

In a bid to find her killer, police experts dusted Bauerdorf's apartment for fingerprints as well as the car and the lightbulb that had been tampered with. They tried to find prints from all three locations that matched, but the only ones that did belonged to the victim. They hoped that the piece of worn towel that was jammed halfway down Bauerdorf's throat might yield some clues. It had stripes, but laundries and hotel and apartment supply companies came up empty.

Investigators interviewed 135 junior hostesses and other workers at the Hollywood Canteen in their quest for clues. Zeigler told them about the persistent dance partner who had been at the club just a few hours

before Bauerdorf was killed, but no one could provide them with a name. Police checked USO centers and other canteens to try to find him. Deputies R. T. Hopkinson and Joe Denis staked out the Hollywood Canteen on the night of October 14, 1944, in hope of finding and questioning the man they nicknamed the “jitterbug” soldier.

Corporal Cosmo Volpe went to the police voluntarily when he heard that they were looking to question him. He said that he had recently transferred from New York to Los Angeles. He had danced with Bauerdorf the night before her murder, but he left the Canteen at 10 PM and went to his base at Lockheed Terminal before being checked in at 11:30 PM. That was too early for him to have been at the victim’s apartment at the time of her death.

Police also learned from Zeigler that Bauerdorf had dated a six foot, four inch serviceman several times less than a month before her murder. He was crazy about her, but she did not particularly like him. She finally refused to go out with him anymore. Police wanted to question him, but they hit another dead end.

Police Captain Gordon Bowers, Lieutenant Garner Brown, and Lieutenant Hopkinson went door-to-door in the neighborhood hoping that someone had seen Bauerdorf’s murderer and could provide a description. Neither that nor interviews with workers in the area yielded any new information. A sailor was questioned in Long Beach, but police concluded that he wasn’t a suspect.

## CONFESSION

At the end of December 1944, John Sumter walked into the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s office in San Francisco and confessed that he had killed Bauerdorf. The 21-year-old former soldier and Navy seaman claimed that he had met her on the streetcar and accompanied her to her apartment. He “bummed” a coffee off her, and then another soldier came for a visit. He killed Bauerdorf after the other soldier left. Police discounted the story because there was no streetcar located within half a mile of her home, and her killer stole her car. The FBI learned that Sumter had been discharged from the army for writing bad checks, and his family said that he had spent time in a sanitarium.

A few days after Bauerdorf’s death, her body was placed on a train and sent to New York. She was buried in a family plot in Woodlawn cemetery on Long Island. Her killer has never been found.

**FURTHER READING**

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- “Ex-Soldier’s Tale of Killing Heiress Discounted.” *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1944, 6.
- “Janitor Gives Evidence in Murder of Oil Heiress.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1944, A3.
- “Neighbor Tells Heiress Screams on Death Night.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1944, 2.
- “Oil Executive’s Daughter Found Dead in Bathtub.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1944, 5.
- “People and Places in Strange Death of Oil Heiress.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1944, 3.



Police collaborated with a Los Angeles newspaper to help identify Elizabeth Short. Photofest.

# The Black Dahlia: The Murder of Elizabeth Short (1946)

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*The well-known murder of Elizabeth Short marked the first time that fingerprints were transmitted over the wire in an effort to identify the victim. It was also the impetus for the creation of the first sex offender registry in the United States.*

Dorothy French felt sorry for the attractive young woman who was hanging out at the Aztec Theater in San Diego where she worked. The attractive stranger was five feet, five inches tall, weighed about 115 pounds, had jet-black hair, and green eyes. She had been there for hours on that day in early December 1946, and she appeared to have nowhere else to go. French brought her to the home that she shared with her mother Elvera at Camino Padera in Pacific Beach.

There was something both attractive and mysterious about Elizabeth Short. She said little about her past, but did reveal that her fiancé Major Matt Gordon was killed in a plane crash in India a few days after World War II had ended. She had come to Hollywood to become an actress, but like many others before her had ended up working odd jobs, mostly waitressing. Short stayed with the Frenches until a red-haired man picked her up on January 8, 1947. He was about 25 years old and drove a light-colored coupe with a Huntington Beach license plate. She was in a good mood as she talked with “Bob,” and they loaded her two suitcases and hatbox into the trunk of his vehicle. Robert Manley was a salesman who lived with his wife and four-month-old son.

Manley and Short spent the night at a San Diego hotel. The next day, she told him that she had to meet her sister at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. When Manley and Short reached Los Angeles at about 5 PM on January 9, he brought her to the Greyhound Bus Depot on Seventh Street to help her put her hatbox and suitcases in a locker. Then he drove her to the Biltmore Hotel on Olive Street. Built in 1923, this upscale and elegant building featured Spanish-Italian Renaissance architecture. They arrived just after 6 PM.

At Short’s request he went to the reception desk and asked if Virginia West had registered at the hotel. The desk clerk replied that no one by that name had checked in. As Manley left the lobby, he glanced over his shoulder at Short. She was wearing a black tailored suit, black stockings, and black high-heeled suede shoes. A light-colored full-length coat was draped over one arm, and she carried a black plastic handbag. Her black clothing contrasted with her soft, alabaster skin. He had barely left when Short began talking to the clerk at the cigar stand. She stayed in the lobby for about an hour, pacing the marble

floor near the telephone booths. It was the last time that anyone saw her alive.

## GRISLY DISCOVERY

Less than a week later, on January 15, 1947, Betty Bersinger was pushing her daughter in a stroller on Norton Avenue between Thirty-Ninth Street and Coliseum when something caught her eye. She did not know what it was, but without thinking turned the stroller around to shield her toddler's view. Initially she thought someone had dropped a mannequin in the vacant lot amid the grass and weeds just a few feet from the sidewalk, but then she realized that it was the body of a young woman severed in half. Bersinger crossed the street and knocked on the door of the nearest house. Using the woman's phone, she called the police at 10:40 AM "A person needs attending to," she said, and then she hung up.

When officers arrived at the scene, they found a nude body that had been carefully sliced in half at the waist and drained of blood. It had other cuts and showed signs of mutilation. The victim's face had been slashed from ear to ear, creating an eerie clown-like smile. The two halves of her body appeared to have been carefully posed rather than being hurriedly dumped. Lieutenant Jess Haskins made notes about the wounds and knife marks on the body and the lack of blood at the scene. It was clear that the victim had been killed elsewhere and her murderer had posed her body in plain view. She had been dead about 10 hours. Judging by the way in which the body was neatly cut in half, Haskins had the impression that the killer had some knowledge of anatomy and surgery.

By now, the trickle of onlookers and curiosity-seekers had grown into a steady stream as word of the killing spread. All five Los Angeles daily newspapers had sent reporters to cover the story. According to documents later released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the press had taken photos at the scene before the police had done so. When the *Los Angeles Examiner* heard about the killing of a beautiful girl severed at the waist, they sent every available reporter and photographer to the scene. "FIEND TORTURES, KILLS GIRL," the *Examiner's* headline blared. The story of the murder would stay on the front page of the newspaper for the next 35 days. The body that had been severed and was seemingly put on display had captured the public's attention.

Police took the woman's fingerprints. They had no idea who she was, and hoped that the FBI in Washington, D.C., could help. The police sent the prints to the FBI by airmail special delivery. Warden Woolard,

assistant managing editor of the *Los Angeles Examiner*, picked up the phone and called Jack Donahoe, the Los Angeles Police Department's chief of homicide. He pointed out that it could take a week to identify the victim, giving the killer more time to get away.

Woolard suggested sending the fingerprints over the wire, just as the newspaper did with photos. This had never been tried before, but if it worked it would speed up the police's ability to identify the victim. When International News Photo wire opened at 4 AM, the prints were sent to the Hearst Newspaper's Washington, D.C., bureau, where they would be taken off the wire and handed to the FBI. The first attempt to transmit the fingerprints over the telephone wires was not successful, as the prints were too blurry. News bureau photographer Russ Lapp suggested blowing up each fingerprint and sending them one at a time as 8-by-10-inch images.

The FBI's Identification Division in Washington, D.C., received a copy of the fingerprints at 11 AM on January 16. Less than an hour later, they had identified the victim of the gruesome murder in Los Angeles from among the 104 million fingerprints they had on file at the time. She was Elizabeth Short, age 22, born July 29, 1924, in Hyde Park, Massachusetts. She had two sets of fingerprints on file. The first one was taken when she applied for a job as a clerk at the commissary of the army's Camp Cooke (now Vandenberg Air Force Base) in California on January 30, 1943. She worked there for only a few weeks.

The second set of prints stemmed from her arrest on September 23, 1943, for underage drinking at the El Paseo Restaurant in Santa Barbara. Policewoman Mary H. Unkefer brought her to the Greyhound bus station and put her on a bus to Boston to go home to her mother Phoebe Short in Medford, Massachusetts. Short returned home, but she came back to California three years later.

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover appreciated the *Examiner's* assistance with the case. "The action of the *Los Angeles Examiner* in transmitting to the FBI the fingerprints of the unidentified murder victim is an excellent illustration of the cooperation of the press with law enforcement, and it is such cooperation that aids law enforcement in curbing the increase in crime," he said at the time. For its part, the *Examiner* got a scoop; it had the name of the victim ahead of the other newspapers in the country. Armed with the victim's identification, the FBI sent the Los Angeles Police Department a photo of Short and a record of her past employment. They had her "mug shot" from Santa Barbara police on file and supplied it to reporters.

In the 1940s, reporters treated stories as investigations. They hunted down leads and competed with one another to be the first to break a story. The lines between journalists and police were also sometimes blurred, as reporters chased down their own leads—sometimes digging up information ahead of police detectives. As an FBI agent commented, “It is not possible for the investigators to have a confidential telephone conversation or even read mail without some news reporter looking it over to see if it relates to this case.” The *Los Angeles Herald Express* and the *Los Angeles Examiner*, both owned by William Randolph Hearst, were particularly aggressive.

Although the five Los Angeles newspapers competed to out-scoop each other, there was one line not one of them was ready to cross. They did not print photos of Short’s mutilated face nor of her body sliced in two. Those images were considered too shocking; media outlets touched them up to remove signs of violence before printing them. Several of the un-retouched photos didn’t surface until 1984, when Kenneth Anger’s compendium of Hollywood scandals, *Hollywood Babylon II*, was published.

Dr. Frederick Newharr of the Los Angeles Office of the County Coroner performed an autopsy on Short’s body the same day that she was identified on January 16. He concluded that Short had died of “hemorrhage and shock due to concussion of the brain and lacerations of the face.” Her killer had beaten her in the head and sliced up her face while she was still alive, but her skull was not fractured. Other wounds to her body were inflicted post-mortem. Her trunk had been severed by a cut straight through the abdomen. Smears for signs of sperm were negative. The autopsy dispelled subsequent rumors that Short had abnormal genitalia that prevented her from having normal intercourse. Newharr also noticed that Short’s lower teeth were in bad shape and her fingernails were chewed to the quick.

## RETRACING SHORT’S STEPS

Detectives questioned Short’s relatives, acquaintances, and former boyfriends. Within a few days, police located Short’s father. Cleo Short had abandoned the family years earlier and moved to the West Coast. He said that his daughter had stayed with him when she first arrived in California in 1943, but the two had a disagreement and went their separate ways. He said that his daughter was more interested in going out dancing with servicemen than in keeping house and doing dishes.

After Short left Santa Barbara in September 1943, she spent the next few years bouncing around between Miami and Massachusetts. While waiting on tables in Miami, she met and fell in love with Major Matthew Gordon. The two were engaged. He fought in the Pacific and survived World War II, only to be killed in a plane crash on August 10, 1945, shortly after Japan had surrendered.

In July 1946, Short returned to Hollywood to start her life over again and to see an old boyfriend. She had met Lieutenant Gordon Fickling in Florida, but he was now stationed in Long Beach, California. The relationship did not work out, but the two continued to keep in touch when he moved out of state. She moved repeatedly in the final months of her life, but was often seen in the company of men who picked up her tab at bars and nightclubs. Fickling mailed her money in December 1946. The last letter he received was dated January 8, 1947—a week before her murder. In it, she said she was moving to Chicago to become a fashion model.

Short had come to Hollywood to break into show business, but it was her gruesome murder that would make her famous. She was dubbed the “Black Dahlia” for her rumored penchant for black clothes. The name was derived from the Veronica Lake/Alan Ladd movie *The Blue Dahlia*.

Police learned that Robert Manley was the last person to see Short alive. Detectives Sam Flowers and Jasper Wass waited for him to return from a business trip with his boss, Harry Palmer. When the car pulled up, Palmer stepped out of the driver’s side and was ordered to freeze. Press photographers snapped away as Manley climbed out of the car slowly, with his hands up, and was frisked by Wass.

Police took Manley to the eastside Hollenbeck Station instead of Central to avoid reporters. The chief of homicide Donahoe had set up a polygraph test and a team of investigators to interrogate their main suspect. His wife Harriet greeted him tenderly at the station. Police questioned Manley throughout the night, hoping to extract a confession, but he kept dozing off. An FBI search of army records revealed that he had been discharged as “mentally unfit for service.” The LAPD led the investigation, but the FBI performed background checks on possible suspects. Manley admitted that he had stayed with Short at a motel on January 8 on his way to Los Angeles, but nothing had happened, he maintained. The night of her murder he played cards with his wife and friends, Mr. and Mrs. Don Holmes.

Police administered a polygraph test, whose use was relatively new to the department. The test measures such physiological responses as a person’s pulse, blood pressure, and respiration while they answer a

series of questions. It is believed that false responses will produce certain physiological measurements, but the results of Manley's lie-detector test were inconclusive. He was escorted to his cell and reporters were camped out nearby, hoping to get a scoop, but Manley wouldn't talk. Police checked autopsy results, administered a second polygraph test later that day, and Manley's friends supported his alibi. He was released.

Police were stumped. If Short was last seen alive on January 9, 1947, what was she doing and where did she go until her body was found on January 15? On January 21, the Los Angeles Police Department issued a bulletin looking for information about her whereabouts the week of January 9 to January 15. A few days later, a man phoned *Los Angeles Examiner* editor James Richardson about the media coverage of Short's murder. He offered to "send you some of the things she had with her when she . . . shall we say . . . disappeared?" He promised to send a package containing a few items from her handbag. Richardson wasn't sure if it was a hoax.

It wasn't. Postal inspectors intercepted a package that was addressed to the *Examiner*. A message that was enclosed was written using letters cut from a newspaper. It said: "Here is Dahlia's belongings. Letter to follow." The parcel had been wiped with gasoline to erase any traces of fingerprints. Inside were photographs, a newspaper clipping of Matt Gordon's obituary, her birth certificate, the bus station claim check for her luggage, and an address book. The name "Mark Hansen" was embossed on the cover of the small leather address book.

## POLICE INVESTIGATION

Donahoe thought that the address book was the break he was looking for in the case. The book had more than 75 names inside. Short had lived at Hansen's house on Carlos Avenue from August to October 1946. She had shared a room with Ann Toth, an actress and Hansen's girlfriend at the time. Hansen had been routinely questioned a week earlier but said that he knew nothing about Short. Police brought Hansen in for questioning again. The middle-aged entrepreneur owned the Florentine Gardens nightclub. This time, he admitted that he had known Short but said that he didn't date her. In fact, she had stolen the address book from him, he said. Detectives found no evidence linking him to the murder.

On Sunday, January 26, a handwritten letter was sent to the *Examiner*. “Here it is. Turning in Wed., Jan. 29, 10 AM. Had my fun at police. Black Dahlia Avenger.” Police waited at the spot that was named, poised to arrest the killer of Elizabeth Short, but nobody turned up. Donahoe believed that the murderer had changed his mind about giving himself up. Another message using letters cut and pasted from the newspaper arrived the next day: “Have changed my mind. You would not give me a square deal. Dahlia killing was justified.” Five latent fingerprints were lifted from the letters, but the FBI crime lab found no matches.

Meanwhile, confessions were pouring in. Within a few days of the highly publicized murder, eight people stepped forward and claimed to be the killer. Police had withheld certain details of the crime so that they could use the information to help them determine who was the real killer. All the people who confessed were ruled out as suspects. Within a month the LAPD had eliminated 59 suspects, most of whom were “confessing Sams.” These people ate up valuable police time that could have been spent trying to track down the real killer.

Given the neat and clean way in which Short’s body was bisected, detectives of the LAPD wondered if the murderer had some medical training. In February 1947, they asked the University of Southern California Medical School to provide a list of their students. The school was in the same neighborhood in which the body was found. The school complied after being assured that the names would not be made public. The FBI conducted background checks but found nothing suspicious or unusual.

Despite their dogged digging and investigating, police and reporters began exhausting possible leads within a few weeks. Detectives continued to interrogate possible suspects for another decade, but none led to an arrest for the murder of Elizabeth Short. However, the case did lead Republican assemblyman C. Don Field to introduce a bill on February 2, 1947, calling for the creation of a sex offender registry. California became the first state in the United States to make the registration of convicted sex offenders mandatory.

## MYSTIQUE OF THE BLACK DAHLIA

More than 60 years later, houses now stand on the empty lot where Short’s remains were found, but the mystique of the Black Dahlia

continues to linger. She was an attractive and mysterious victim who was brutally murdered and given an evocative nickname. She was romanticized as a tragic beauty who led a seemingly nomadic existence and went to Hollywood in search of fame and fortune. It was her tragic end for which she became best known, and her story continues to haunt people's imaginations.

The case spawned countless books, Web sites, and theories about her fate. California resident Janice Knowlton was in the midst of therapy for severe depression when she remembered violent events involving her father, the late George Frederick Knowlton. She claimed that Short was one of her father's victims. She came up with circumstantial links from her father to a string of unsolved murders across the United States, from the family home in Massachusetts to California. Her relatives supported her claims that Knowlton was a violent man who had bragged about having committed murders for which he was not caught. He died in a 1962 car crash near Claremore, Oklahoma. Her book, *Daddy Was the Black Dahlia Killer*, was published in 1995. A troubled Knowlton committed suicide in 2004 at the age of 67.

In his 1998 book *Severed: The True Story of the Black Dahlia Murder*, author John Gilmore claimed that the killer was Arnold Smith, also known as Jack Anderson Wilson. This shady character lived near the spot where Short's body was found, but he died in a hotel fire before police could question him. In the 2003 book *Black Dahlia Avenger: A Genius for Murder*, former Los Angeles homicide detective Steve Hodel found his father's name on the list of suspects into the killing. After investigating the matter, he concluded that his father, the late physician George Hodel, had killed both Elizabeth Short and Jeanne French.

Jazz composer and saxophonist Bob Belden wrote a 12-part musical suite "*Black Dahlia*." In 2005, Bay Area artist Hailey Ashcraft was the curator of a multimedia exhibition exploring the mystique surrounding Elizabeth Short. One of the pieces was a photograph of a vacant lot with two abandoned couches. In 2006, Universal Pictures released a film called *The Black Dahlia* based on James Ellroy's fictionalized 1987 novel of the same name. Brian De Palma directed the \$45-million movie, which starred Josh Hartnett, Aaron Eckhart, Scarlett Johansson, Hilary Swank, and Mia Kirshner.

Elizabeth Short is long gone, but the mystery surrounding her death is not.



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**Unknown Child:  
The Boy in the Box  
(1957)**

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*The case of the little boy whose identity has remained anonymous since his death in 1957 illustrates how forensic techniques have been applied over a period of more than 40 years to try to unravel this mystery. Forensic anthropology and fingerprints were used during the initial investigation to try to identify the tiny victim—but to no avail. More than 30 years later, a bust was created of what the little boy’s father might look like and mitochondrial DNA was coaxed from his remains. In real life, unlike on television shows, forensics does not always yield the answers that are sought.*

Frederick Benonis was driving along Susquehanna Road on his way home from school at LaSalle College on February 11, 1957. The road in Fox Chase, a community on the outskirts of Philadelphia, was little more than a narrow country lane about half a mile long. A home for troubled girls, run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, sat on one side of Susquehanna. Across the road were woods, fields, and brush where rabbits and other small game would hide. A rabbit scurried in front of his car, and Benonis stopped and followed it. He found two steel traps for small animals, sprang them, and returned to his vehicle.

Winter appeared to be clinging to Philadelphia as temperatures ranged from a chilly 20 degrees Fahrenheit and into the 40-degree range. Benonis drove past the same spot along Susquehanna Road two weeks later, at about 3:15 PM on February 25, 1957. He wanted to see if the traps that he had sprung earlier were still there. That is when he noticed a three-foot-long cardboard box that was partly covered with vines and brush. It looked new and was located about 15 feet from the road. Benonis looked inside. He could not tell whether the box held a doll or a small child wrapped in an old blanket. Not wanting to get involved, he returned to his car and went home.

He was driving to school the next morning through drizzle and a light fog when he heard on the radio that four-year-old Mary Jane Barker was missing from her home in Bellmawr, New Jersey, which was located just across from the Delaware River. Could it be that her body was in the box that he had found the previous day? When Benonis arrived at LaSalle College, he talked to two faculty counselors and his brother, who happened to be a priest. They urged him to contact the police.

Sergeant Charles Gargani was at his desk at the homicide squad when the telephone rang just after 10 AM. After hearing Benonis’s story, he

broadcast a message to the officers patrolling in squad cars. "Investigate a cardboard box in the woods off Susquehanna Road, across from the girls' home. Could be a body inside or could be a doll," he told them.

Patrolman Elmer Palmer, the father of two young children, was the first officer to arrive on the scene. He walked through the drizzle and along a dirt path in the garbage-strewn area to the spot that Benonis had described. There, he found a cardboard box marked FRAGILE, HANDLE WITH CARE. The top of the head and part of a tiny shoulder protruded from the box. He knew immediately that it wasn't a doll. He went back to his patrol car and radioed headquarters.

Sam Weinstein arrived soon after. The 31-year-old former Marine, who had served in the Pacific during World War II, gently lifted the tiny body out of the box when the ambulance arrived. The little boy was completely naked and wrapped in a dirty old blanket. His blue eyes were half closed, and his eyeballs were sunken into their sockets. There were bruises on his face, stomach, and legs. His right hand and the soles of his feet were wrinkled, indicating that they had been immersed in water just before or after he died.

His blond hair had been given a crude, homemade crew cut, as though someone had placed a bowl on his head and cut around it. Perhaps it was given by someone who was inexperienced or worked in an institution. There were some hair clippings on his body. It appeared that someone had cut his hair without placing a sheet around his neck, or when he was naked and perhaps already dead. Were they trying to conceal his identity? But he was clean and his nails had been neatly clipped. He was wrapped in a piece of cheap, faded, rust and green-colored blanket. Another piece was tucked inside the box, but the third piece to complete the 64-by-76-inch blanket was missing.

The city's chief medical examiner Dr. Joseph W. Spelman arrived on the scene. He said that the boy appeared to be between four and six years old, but he wouldn't know what killed him until he took him to the morgue and conducted an autopsy. Fixing a time of death would be more difficult. It was cold enough outside to preserve the little boy's body and stave off the decomposition that could help determine when he died. "The cool weather makes it difficult to tell how long the boy was dead," Spelman later wrote in his autopsy report, "but it was at least two or three days, and possibly as long as two or three weeks. I don't think the body was in the field that long, though." (Mary Jane Barker was found dead a few days later. She had died of starvation after getting accidentally stuck in the closet of a vacant house near her home.)

## AUTOPSY

An autopsy later that night established that the boy had a full set of baby teeth, no deformities, and no signs of having had broken bones. However, he had been malnourished and he died from a severe blow to the head. The bruises that he displayed had been inflicted at the same time and showed that he had been savagely beaten. He was 41 inches tall and weighed a mere 30 pounds. He had a small L-shaped scar on his chin, a 1.5-inch surgical scar on the left side of his chest, a well-healed scar on his groin that appeared to be from a hernia operation, and a scar on his left ankle from what appeared to be an incision to expose veins for medical infusion or transfusion. The boy was circumcised but had no vaccination marks.

In the hours since the first news reports about the unknown child surfaced, nobody had come forward to identify the boy in the box. No missing person reports matched the child's description. Police detectives dressed the child and took pictures of his battered face, hoping that someone would recognize him.

Dr. Wilton M. Krogman was a professor of physical anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Medicine and a founder of forensic anthropology. He was referred to as "the bone detective." He examined the unknown boy and took x-rays of his bones. He told police that based on scars on the long bones of the legs, he believed that the boy had been chronically ill and malnourished for about a year. He said this could happen with an itinerant family.

Police had little physical evidence to give them clues to the boy's identity, but they hoped that some items found at the scene would help. The cardboard box in which he was found once contained a bassinet. The serial number on the box indicated that it had been shipped from the manufacturer to a J. C. Penney store in suburban Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, at least 15 miles from where the boy's body was found. The store received a dozen bassinets on November 27, 1956, and sold them for \$7.50 between December 3, 1956, and February 16, 1957, but the retailer could not say who had bought them since everyone paid cash.

Police used newspapers to ask buyers of the bassinets to contact them and indicate where they had disposed of the cartons. Eight of the buyers stepped forward to say that the box was either still in their home or that they had put it out for the trash, but garbage collectors had long burned the boxes. The Federal Bureau of Investigation was

unable to find any useful latent fingerprints on the box that had been found at the scene.

The cheap cotton flannel blanket in which the boy was wrapped had been recently washed and mended with poor quality cotton thread. Technicians at the Philadelphia Textile Institute concluded that the blanket had been manufactured either at Swannanoa, North Carolina, or in Granby, Quebec, in Canada. With thousands of blankets being sold, it was impossible to determine precisely where this one was purchased.

A man's blue corduroy Ivy League-style cap (size 7 1/8) had been found near the footpath leading from the road, about 15 feet from the box. The distinctive cap had a leather strap and buckle. Inside it was the name and address of the cap maker, Philadelphia's Robbins Bald Eagle Hat & Cap Company. Owner Hannah Robbins said the cap was one of 12 made before May 1956. She remembered that a blond man about 26 to 30 years old had bought that particular cap a few months earlier. He had asked her to sew on the leather strap and buckle. Since he had paid cash, she had no contact name and address. Armed with the cap and a picture of the boy, detectives visited more than 100 stores and businesses in the area. Nobody remembered seeing either the boy or anyone wearing the cap. Another lead had hit a dead end.

## SEARCH FOR CLUES

Chief Inspector of Detectives John Kelly wondered if police had missed any evidence at the scene. He organized one of the largest searches for a homicide case in Philadelphia that involved more than 300 patrolmen, detectives, and park guards and 270 police academy recruits. They combed a 12-square-mile area around the spot where the body was found while 20 detectives went door-to-door to 300 homes hoping that residents could identify the boy from photographs. The searchers found a handkerchief, a child's scarf, and a dead cat wrapped in a man's sweater, and a child-sized blue corduroy cap. A quarter mile away they found a piece of blanket that resembled the one that had enveloped the boy. It was sent to a lab for analysis, but it turned out not to be identical.

Police had also been unable to determine when the box had been hidden in the brush near Susquehanna Road. Two detectives canvassed

nearby homes door-to-door two weeks after the baby was discovered in an effort to try to turn up new leads. They found the person who owned the traps Benonis had seen. They belonged to 18-year-old John Powroznik, the son of Polish immigrants who had settled in the area.

The youth had not been checking his 19 traps regularly, but he spotted the box on February 24 at 1:30 PM on his way to play basketball. He thought there was something odd about it, so he climbed off his bike and went to have a closer look. He saw the baby's body when he lifted the top of the box. He turned around and went home, without telling anyone what he had seen. Months earlier in another field, his brother had found the body of a man who had committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree. John's family had found the police questioning upsetting—a particularly sensitive situation for people having come from behind the Iron Curtain and having a distrust of police. This new information meant that the boy in the box had been dead for at least 48 hours before police were notified and began investigating.

Bill Kelly, a 29-year-old fingerprint expert and head of the identification unit, hoped that prints from the child would lead to his identification. He arrived at the morgue and looked at the young child lying on a metal gurney. He put ink on the little boy's feet and fingertips and pressed them onto paper. The fingerprints from the left hand were perfect. Despite wrinkling from being immersed in water, Kelly was able to coax prints from the right hand and the feet. But it was to no avail. The Philadelphia Police, the Pennsylvania State Police, and the FBI were not able to find a match for the youngster's prints.

Kelly had spent four years fighting in World War II and Korea, but there was something about this brutally murdered boy without a name that bothered him, and he wouldn't give up. He was determined to give this unknown child a name. Hospitals record each baby's footprint at birth. Almost every day before or after work, Kelly would spend two or three hours of his own time poring over maternity files in hospital records departments. He would open each file, pull out the prints, and place them beside those of the boy. Sometimes they clearly didn't match. Other times he had to use a magnifying glass to check. Then there were those prints that were little more than an inky blur, but nothing turned up to help with identification.

Investigators began to wonder whether the reason that nobody had claimed the little boy was because he had lived in an institution. City Welfare Commissioner Randolph E. Wise checked that all the children in foster homes under his care had been accounted for. Detectives checked

orphanages and children's homes as well as missing person reports, but no leads turned up.

The police sent out flyers with the boy's photo to police departments throughout eastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey. The Philadelphia Gas Works mailed 200,000 flyers to its customers with their monthly bills. More were circulated by the Philadelphia Electric Company, grocery stores, insurance agents, and through a pharmacist's association. The FBI's Law Enforcement Bulletin, which is sent to every law enforcement agency in the country, published an article on the case to alert investigators. Flyers were sent to physicians in the Philadelphia area. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* circulated a complete medical description in the hope that some doctor, somewhere, might recognize the boy. More than 300,000 circulars were sent out in all. The case received extensive media coverage, and headlines dubbed him "The Boy in the Box."

## LEADS FROM ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

Leads poured in from California to Maine. Marilyn Damman's 34-month-old son Steven had been kidnapped from outside a Long Island, New York, supermarket on October 31, 1955, while she ducked inside for 10 minutes to shop. Was he the boy in the box? At first, the Philadelphia police thought it could be. The boy was about the same age as Steven would have been; they both had blue eyes and small scars under their chins. The child's footprints were sent to the Nassau County police department. They made x-rays of the left arm for signs of a previous fracture that the Damman boy had suffered. The police in Long Island noted that the footprints did not match, and the faces were not that similar. Just to be sure, however, Nassau County Detective Inspector James Farrell came to Philadelphia and examined the unknown boy's body. It was not Steven Damman. The facial appearance and build weren't the same, and the x-ray revealed that there were no signs that the left arm had ever been broken.

A man contacted police and said that he was driving along Veree Road two days before the body was found nearby. He saw a middle-aged woman and a boy, perhaps 12 or 14 years old, unloading something from the trunk of a car. He stopped and offered them help because he thought that their car had a flat tire. The woman shook her head. The man was unable to give a description of the woman and the boy because they tried to keep their backs to him. He had the



impression that they were trying to conceal the car's license plate by standing in front of it.

A woman in Camden, New Jersey, across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, phoned. She said that the boy's picture resembled a young child who was traveling with an itinerant roofer whom she had hired. She went to the morgue to view the tiny body. Upon seeing it, the woman said that she believed it was the same child she had seen. Police canvassed her neighborhood and found three other people who positively identified the boy at the morgue. Two others were not so sure, but they admitted there was a resemblance.

The roofer was identified as Charles D. Speece, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He had left the community a year earlier with his eight-year-old son and lived in Camden until February 23, 1957—just a few days before the unknown boy's body was found. A police bulletin was sent out to 13 states for Speece to be picked up. Speece's estranged wife came to the morgue and was emphatic that the unknown boy was not her son, but the police wanted to establish her son's whereabouts before eliminating the lead. When Speece heard that the police were looking for him, he phoned relatives and let them talk to his son. Pennsylvania state troopers later found the pair in a Philadelphia suburb safe and sound.

A Philadelphia barber saw the newspaper picture and the body at the morgue. He insisted that he had cut the boy's hair less than a week before the body was found. He said that the boy told him he had five brothers and one sister and lived in the Strawberry Mansion part of town. Two detectives accompanied the barber to find the family—but that search was unsuccessful. A young Marine who had recently returned from overseas believed the boy was his younger brother—until an intensive investigation found his sibling safe in California.

Having run out of solid leads, detectives began speculating about other possibilities. Perhaps the boy was the child of Hungarian refugees who had arrived in the United States after the Hungarian revolution of October 1956. Homicide Captain David H. Roberts and his men followed up with immigration authorities and learned that every Hungarian refugee had been vaccinated. The little boy showed no marks indicating that he had been vaccinated. Another lead had come to a dead end.

It seemed odd that nobody had recognized the child. Surely someone, somewhere, must have noticed that a neighborhood child was missing. Young police officers dressed as playground instructors asked children

in school yards, parks, and recreation centers if a thin little boy had been around that was no longer seen. Every lead was tracked down and all the children were accounted for. Was the boy's family new to Philadelphia or their neighborhood? Moving companies supplied the names of families who had moved in the weeks before and after the body was found. After tracking down the 763 white families, they came up empty-handed—again.

## BURIAL

Throughout the investigation, the unknown child's tiny body lay at the morgue in hope of finding someone, anyone who could give him a name. Five months later, with leads petering out, authorities decided that it was time to give the child a proper burial. He needed a better coffin than the cardboard box in which he had been found. The homicide squad wanted to give him more dignity in death than he had been accorded in life. They took up a collection to pay for the funeral.

On July 24, 1957, about a dozen detectives gathered as three among their ranks and a member of the city medical examiner's staff carried the small white casket to the graveside of America's Unknown Child. Captain Warren F. Guthriell, chaplain of the Fourth Naval District in Philadelphia, said a final prayer. The detectives heard the familiar words intoned, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Red roses and gladioli lay upon the casket with a card: "From the members of the homicide squad." They watched silently as his casket was lowered into the ground in a municipal cemetery near the Byberry state hospital. On the headstone read the inscription, Heavenly Father, Bless This Unknown Boy.

The men who worked on the case never really stopped thinking about that little boy. In 1990, former police officer and FBI agent William Fleisher, forensic reconstructionist Frank Bender, and forensic psychologist and criminal profiler Richard Walter formed the Vidocq Society. This Philadelphia-based volunteer organization uses its members' combined experience in law enforcement to help solve cold cases involving violent crimes, murders, and abductions in which the victim was killed.

In early 1998, the Philadelphia Police Department asked the Society to adopt the case of the Unknown Child. Three retired Philadelphia police officers began working with homicide detective Thomas Augustine to try to solve this old mystery. Augustine, who was 11 years old when he

saw the picture of the Unknown Child in a store window, grew up not far from where the body was found. Weinstein, the second police officer to arrive on the scene back in 1957, had retired from the force in 1985. He led the Vidocq Society's team, and he was joined by Joseph McGillen and William Kelly.

## MODERN FORENSICS

Forensic techniques had evolved considerably since the boy's body was found in 1957. Bender created a bust of what he believed the boy's father might look like, hoping that someone would recognize him. On November 4, 1998, the unknown boy's remains were exhumed and DNA samples were taken to compare with possible surviving relatives should anyone step forward. In April 2001, forensics experts were able to coax mitochondrial DNA from the core of the boy's teeth. Mitochondrial DNA is inherited from mother to child, whereas nuclear DNA comes from both parents. Mitochondrial DNA is easier to extract from hair, bones, or even teeth, particularly when a body's remains are degraded.

The boy's burial site in the potter's field was littered with condoms and other trash and did not reflect the dignity that he deserved, Fleisher decided. The Ivy Hill Cemetery donated a plot by the entrance. More than 100 people attended a ceremony on November 11, 1998, when the child was reburied. A bagpiper played "*Going Home*," and his body was lowered into the ground. The Vidocq Society erected a new, black granite marker on his grave that bore the inscription "America's Unknown Child."

The television show "*America's Most Wanted*" aired a story about the case on October 3, 1998, generating hundreds of tips. The three retired officers carefully went through six large storage boxes of information that had been gathered over the years and followed up on the leads that the show generated. They knew that they may not be able to find the little boy's killer, but they felt that he at least deserved a name other than "America's Unknown Child."

On February 25, 2000, an Ohio psychiatrist phoned the homicide division. One of her outpatients, "Mary," had woken up in the wee hours of the morning in a state of panic; she wanted to report a murder that had occurred 43 years ago that day. Through her psychiatrist, she told the men that she had grown up in Lower Merion. Her father was a high school teacher and her mother was a librarian. She was an only

child and later earned a doctorate in chemistry. When she was about 13 years old, she and her mother went to someone's home where her mother handed over an envelope of money to a couple in exchange for a toddler. She kept the boy in the basement and didn't allow him to leave the house. He never talked, as though he had a mental disability. She and the boy were both abused and malnourished, she said.

She finally agreed to meet Augustine, McGillen, and Kelly in Ohio in June 2002. She was a tall, broad-shouldered woman. During their interview she told them that when she was 15, the boy threw up after he ate some baked beans. Her mother became angry about the mess and beat him repeatedly. He let out a cry and then went silent. Her mother cleaned him and cut his hair before she wrapped him in a blanket. They slipped outside using the basement door that led to a driveway and had a row of shrubs that blocked the view of the neighbor's yard. Then she placed him in the trunk of the car and they drove to a lonely spot. A man stopped his car to ask if they needed help. Her mother shook her head "no." After he drove off, her mother put the boy in an empty box nearby and drove home. "Mary" said that his name was Jonathan.

Kelly and McGillen knocked on doors along the street on which she had once lived. They were able to confirm that her family had lived there. They followed the route that she described from the place where the child was abandoned to her home in Lower Merion. It matched with her home and the spot where the boy was found. They spoke to a college roommate in whom she had confided that her mother once killed someone. The layout of the basement where she lived was consistent with the description that she had given the investigators, including the location of the door she said that she and her mother used to carry the baby's body to the car. According to the psychiatrist, the story remained the same during a decade of therapy. She wasn't a blood relative of the boy, however, so DNA testing would be useless to confirm the story.

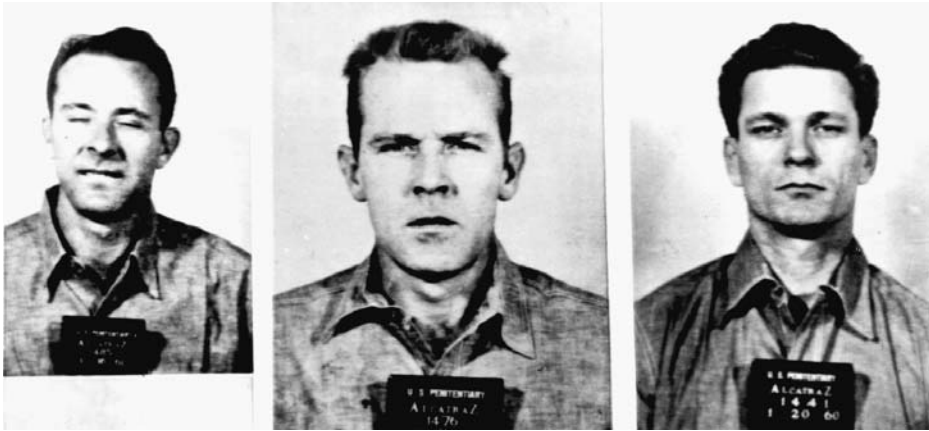
Kelly and McGillen believed her—but Augustine didn't. Police said that the details she provided were a matter of public record. Having been under psychiatric care for part of her adult life made her less than credible, they said. Her parents died years ago. Since her family was not told the little boy's full name, investigators were unable to check birth records. Her story could be neither proved nor disproved.

The wooded area where the little boy was found is now lined with brick homes. A driveway sits next to the spot where he was found. Toys and flowers from investigators and mostly citizens lie at the grave.

People have left such toys as a racecar, a ceramic teddy bear, and bath toys—things that a little boy would enjoy playing with. The little boy whom no one has claimed as their own received more love in death than he likely ever did in life.

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Convicts Clarence Anglin, John William Anglin, and Frank Lee Morris escaped from Alcatraz. Library of Congress.

# Escape from Alcatraz: Frank Morris and the Anglin Brothers (1962)

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*This chapter focuses on the story of a trio of desperados who escaped from Alcatraz, a fortress-like prison, through a combination of ingenuity and sheer luck. This prison break marked this penitentiary's downfall; it was not as escape-proof as had once been believed. The question still remains whether the three convicts made it out alive. Or did they drown before reaching the mainland?*

The route that prisoners took to Alcatraz was the same. The former U.S. Army fort first opened in 1859 to protect San Francisco's port from foreign invasion. It was converted from a U.S. Army prison into the ultimate maximum-security federal prison—the world's most secure penitentiary—in 1934. The forbidding Fort-Knox-like environment, known as "The Rock," sat on a lonely island in the middle of San Francisco Bay, surrounded by nothing but icy waters of 48-to-60 degrees Fahrenheit. It would house such famous inmates as gangster Al Capone, "Machine Gun" Kelly, and Robert Stroud, the infamous "Birdman of Alcatraz."

Security included stronger iron bars, strategically placed guard towers, and a dozen rounds of prisoner head counts each day. Alcatraz had 336 cells but averaged about 260 prisoners who were there because of their behavior in other prisons—not their actual crimes. When they became too much to handle elsewhere, Alcatraz was their last stop. It was supposed to be impossible to escape, but some men did succeed. From 1934 until the prison's closing in 1963, 36 men made a total of 14 escape attempts. Most were either caught or died trying to escape—except for three men.

Allen West, 29, arrived at Alcatraz in June 1958 for his second stint at the island prison. He was born in New York City on March 25, 1929, and his impoverished family moved to Georgia during the Great Depression. By the age of 14, West was serving time at the Georgia State Farm for Boys for car theft. He escaped three times. Over the years, he would be repeatedly incarcerated in Georgia state prison for car theft and burglary. He worked briefly as an electrician's helper and enlisted in the army. He was arrested again soon after basic training and sentenced to four years in prison. He was dishonorably discharged and transferred to a federal prison in Pennsylvania. After several incidents there, he was transferred to the federal maximum security U.S. Penitentiary at Atlanta, Georgia. Along with Leavenworth, that penitentiary was the last stop before Alcatraz.

West was released in October 1951 and arrested again in March 1952 on charges of breaking and entering and grand larceny. He escaped on December 26, 1952, and was picked up a month later in Mississippi after crossing state lines with a stolen vehicle. That netted him five years behind bars. He escaped from Mississippi and was arrested a month later for burglary in Texas. He was sentenced to another five years and sent to Atlanta in June 1953. After being segregated four times because of his behavior, prison officials sent him to Alcatraz in April 1954. He was eventually released but sent back to Alcatraz after being sentenced to 10 years for driving a stolen vehicle across the state line, a federal offence. The compulsively chatty West would be arrested 20 times over the course of his life and was involved in numerous escape attempts.

Frank Lee Morris, 33, arrived in January 1960 after trying to escape from Atlanta, Georgia. He had been abandoned at birth and raised in a series of foster homes. He made repeated stints in reform school and was incarcerated in Louisiana's notorious Angola State Penitentiary. He was a bank burglar and escape artist who had 10 years left to serve in the super-maximum security institution when he arrived at Alcatraz.

While being transported to San Francisco by train, West and Morris had their handcuffs clamped to a padlocked chain around their waist and they were shackled in leg irons. They were taken aboard the *Warden Johnston*, the boat to the island named for the first warden at Alcatraz. As the boat approached the shore, a sign on a cliff warned in large letters: "KEEP OFF! Only Government Boats Permitted Within 200 Yards. Persons Entering Closer Without Authorization Do So At Their Own Risk."

## LIFE AT ALCATRAZ

Upon his arrival at Alcatraz, the boat's skipper locked the wheel and tied the key to the end of a line. The guard in the gun tower pulled up the key and kept it until the vessel was scheduled to leave again. The skipper retrieved the key once the guard was certain that the skipper was in command and all of Alcatraz's inmates had been accounted for.

Prisoners boarded a waiting bus at the dock and went through a metal detector that was onboard. A guard on duty at a higher tower watched as the bus climbed a narrow road, gears grinding as it managed steep hairpin turns to the top of island. A welcoming committee of



guards holding rifles waited at the prison entrance. Prisoners had their handcuffs and leg irons removed, they were stripped, showered, examined (including a cavity search for contraband), and given a fresh set of prison garb.

Cells measured five feet by eight feet and were bare except for a cot, sink with one cold water faucet, toilet minus the lid and seat, and a small folding metal table and bench riveted into the wall. The back of the cell was made of concrete, and the bars on the front of the cell were the only place that allowed in light and air. Positioned near the bottom of the rear wall was a 6-by-10-inch metal ventilator grill, which was too small to crawl through even if it could be pried open.

Despite some small variations, prison life had a routine quality to it. The alarm went off at 6 AM, giving inmates 20 minutes to dress, wash up, brush their teeth, comb their hair, make their bed, and tidy the cell. A whistle blew and the men stood by the bars of their cell while the guards made a head count. The cell doors would slide open and men marched along the tier gallery and down a circular steel stairway to the mess hall. They had 20 minutes to eat breakfast before being marched back to their cells for another head count. Afterwards, they were marched out to the yard to work at their assigned job in one of the prison's shops, which included clothing, glove, brush, furniture refinishing, laundry, or dry-cleaning. A guard conducted a head count inside the shop every half hour.

Inmates returned to their cells just after 4 PM, after passing through a metal detector. One prisoner was randomly picked for a quick search and frisk for contraband that the detector had not picked up. Then prisoners took the stairs to their cells for another head count before dinner. As they ate their meals, prisoners faced each other across long tables. Guards patrolled, and silvery ornaments in the ceiling were really tear gas bombs that could be sprayed at the touch of a button if a disturbance broke out in the mess hall.

After dinner, prisoners returned to their cells for one of the final head counts of the day. Lights went out four hours later, at 9:30 PM. A guard would make another head count at 11:30 PM, just after the shift change at midnight, and twice more before 7 AM when the day shift arrived. Guards had to be able to quickly and accurately count inmates throughout the day. They also needed to search a cell for contraband or hidden tools that could be used in an escape and be alert to the use of dummies to trick guards into believing an inmate was in their cell when, in fact, they weren't.

Morris was assigned to a cell near West, whom he had met while they were both incarcerated at the federal penitentiary in Atlanta and assigned a job making brooms in the brush shop. In October 1960, Morris was in the mess hall when he saw another familiar face. He had met brothers John, 32, and Clarence Anglin, 31, when they were serving time in the Atlanta penitentiary for bank robbery. They were from a poor family in Florida, where both men served time before being incarcerated in Georgia and Pennsylvania.

In 1957 Clarence had escaped from prison for the fourth time. John had just finished a sentence for grand larceny. The two men and brother Alfred held up a bank in tiny Columbia, Alabama. They stole \$19,000, but FBI agents caught them four days later in Ohio before they could spend it. John was sentenced to 10 years for the bank heist, while the other two received 15 years and were sent to the Atlanta prison to serve their time. They were eventually transferred to Leavenworth.

Clarence tried to get John out of Leavenworth by cutting the top out of one big breadbox and the bottom from another. John sat in one and Clarence placed loaves of bread on top before covering him with the other box. The delivery truck was about to haul John and the other boxes to a prison farm camp when a supervisor noticed two men struggling to hoist a heavier box onto the truck. John was transferred to the escape-proof Alcatraz. Clarence joined him in January 1961 and was given a cell beside his brother.

West was in segregation for all but 49 days between December 1960 and May 1961. After his final stint, he was assigned to a cell near Morris—and only four down from the Anglin brothers. The men knew Alcatraz was not as escape-proof as it had been made out to be. On December 16, 1937, Oklahomans Ralph Roe and Theodore Cole had made a break.

## PLANS TO ESCAPE

Morris knew that there had to be a way off the island. He had heard a rumor that was circulating for years among the inmates. An unguarded utility corridor ran behind the rows of cells in Block B. The three-foot wide space was filled with water mains, sewer pipes, and electrical conduits feeding into each cell. The doors to the corridor were locked, but there were catwalks inside the corridor at the same height as each tier of cells to give plumbers and electricians access to the pipes.

Ducts in the ceiling connected an air exhaust blower on top of the cellblocks to a large vent hood on the prison's roof. Seven other vents

had previously been dismantled, and the openings sealed with bars and concrete. Since the vent still existed, Morris hoped that the remaining vent was not sealed with concrete. The ventilator shaft was 30 feet above Morris's head, but first he needed to access the utility corridor. With the fog that often descended around the island, tower guards using logs in the bay for target practice, and half-hour counts, Morris knew that a daytime escape was impossible, but perhaps he could flee under the cover of darkness.

One evening while clipping his fingernails, Morris realized that the clipper he was holding had a little arm with a pointed edge that was used to clean dirt from under a nail. He got up from his bed and checked to make sure that the hallway outside his cell was empty. Then he went to the vent at the back of his cell and picked at the concrete on the edge of the vent's metal grill. A few grains fell to the ground. The next day Morris looked at the width of the utility door and figured that the wall behind the cells was about a foot thick. The vent in his cell created an opening that was 6 inches high and 10 inches wide, but Morris figured out that he needed a hole 10 inches high and 14 inches wide for him to squeeze through. Clearly, he needed more information about concrete and mortar, so he borrowed a book on structural engineering from the prison library.

When inmates returned to their cells after supper, the cellblock was filled with noise as some men practiced musical instruments. It was the perfect distraction that Morris needed to do his work. While West kept an eye out for guards, in cell 138 Morris chipped away at the cement around his vent until just before lights went out at 9:30 PM. Each night, he plugged the hole with toilet paper and soap to conceal it. Morris let the Anglin brothers in on his plan. Clarence was particularly adept at escapes. Soon the brothers were also chipping away at their vents using the handles of spoons that they stole from the dining room. One person would chip away while the other was the lookout. Morris concealed his work by casually resting his accordion case against the vent. West placed his guitar, and John Anglin hung a raincoat. They worked away night after night, seven days a week.

The men realized that they would eventually make enough holes around the grill to be able to remove it. They would need to build a fake wall section to conceal their efforts to enlarge the hole enough to squeeze through. Morris made a papier maché picture of a grill to put over the real one. Clarence used a canvas art board with diamond shaped "holes" painted on and stuck an old tobacco box on the other

side to hold it in place. When Clarence and Morris finished their holes, they became lookouts while West and John dug theirs.

Once the men were able to access the utility corridor, they needed to make a raft, paddles, and life vests to escape the island and create dummies to ensure that guards would not immediately detect their escape during head counts and patrols. Clarence worked in the barbershop and collected discarded tufts of dark hair. He also agreed to take up painting and requested pink, white, and black paint along with brushes and canvas.

The quartet ordered magazines from the library and cut out pages that had ads on both sides so that nobody would notice missing pages. Morris wet the pages in the basin of his cell and mixed them with the cement that he had removed from the wall, plaster, soap, and glue. He created a plaster that was molded into the shape of a head. Then he and Clarence experimented with colors until they found the right pigment to create a lifelike dummy. Their creations, nicknamed “Oink” and “Oscar,” were hidden inside the hole behind the fake grill at the back of their cells.

Once the dummies were made, the men turned their attention towards building a raft and life vests. John, who worked in the clothing room in the basement, took to wearing a black raincoat as he returned to his cell from work each day. The guard coming on shift in the afternoon wasn’t aware that John hadn’t worn a raincoat to work in the morning. The plan was to cut up the raincoats to make a raft and life vests, but the men needed a place to hide the supplies that they were beginning to collect for their escape. They made their way down the utility corridor and climbed to the roof of their cellblock, where they set up a secret workshop. While his brother Clarence kept an eye out for a guard, John snuck out through his vent and brought more than 50 raincoats to their secret hiding place.

The March 1962 issue of *Popular Science* had an article about the top new designs in life vests. The men read it carefully and then stitched the seams of the raincoats together to make life vests and a rubber raft. They also built wooden paddles. In April 1962, Morris ordered a concertina. He dismantled the keys and converted the instrument into baffles to inflate the raft.

The men also used their newfound access to the utility corridor to find a way out of the building. Using a network of pipes, they climbed up to the roof and eventually pried open the ventilator at the top of the shaft. They made a fake bolt to keep it in place until everything

was ready. This would not have been possible had the prison taken a guard's suggestion to remove the catwalks and replace them with floors the width of the corridor.

Their plan was helped along by a new seating configuration in the dining room. In July 1961, long 10-man tables had been replaced with smaller ones that seated four people each. Morris, West, and the Anglins sat together and discussed their preparations. In a cost-cutting measure in May 1962, the warden closed down the tower along the road from 4:45 PM to 8 AM. The perch had given guards a sweeping view of the island, including the prison and its yard.

In early June, guards searched the Anglin brothers' cells, but no evidence of their impending escape was found. West worried that he was next. His fake grill was not staying on properly, so he used cement particles to reduce the size of the hole. A week later the Anglins were ready to make their getaway. Five thousand miles away in Florida, Rachel Anglin wrote a letter to her sons on June 11. One of their sisters was getting married at the house in five days. On the West Coast, Morris and the Anglins ate their last meal on The Rock. At 5:30 PM everyone was back in the cells and the guard made a head count. The men in cells 138, 140, 150, and 152 were accounted for.

## **PRISON BREAK**

A few hours later, the cons made their move. Morris rolled up two blankets and tucked them in his bed under the top blanket. He made an indentation in his pillow and placed "Oscar," the dummy head, then tucked the blanket up under the chin, looked around his cell one last time, and then climbed out through the vent. He used a string to pull the accordion over the vent behind him and crawled into the utility corridor. The Anglins were waiting, but West could not get the hole in his vent open again. They would have to leave him behind.

The three men gathered their vests, paddles, and the raft. They climbed out of the ventilator to the roof of the cell house and waited to hear sirens going off, but all they could hear were the sounds of inmates settling in for the night. They crawled along the roof, clutched an exhaust pipe, and shimmied 45 feet down the side of the building to the bottom. The pipe banged against the wall, making a noise that a guard inside the cell-block thought came from the area of the hospital. He went there and stayed 30 to 45 minutes to keep an ear cocked for further hints as to where the sound was coming from, but he heard nothing further.

The guard at the front gate had to stay at his post for the duration, so nobody was patrolling the grounds while the men were escaping.

Meanwhile, seagulls squawked and circled overhead near the men. They scaled a 14-foot fence topped with barbed wire and crawled down a steep rocky cliff to the northeast shore of the island. As they looked out over the water, there were no lights to distinguish nearby Angel Island from the blackness of the night. They inflated their raft, carried it out to the water, and disappeared into the night towards Angel Island 1.5 miles away. It was the thirteenth escape attempt from Alcatraz—a number that was tattooed on Frank Morris's left index finger.

West finally managed to break through his vent at 1:45 AM. He climbed up to the roof and collected his life jacket. Looking out over the bay, he realized that the others had left without him. He climbed back down and returned to his cell. Ironically, a classification committee convened about three months earlier had commended him for good behavior. A frequent visitor to solitary confinement, he had managed to remain in the general population for nearly a year.

The guards continued to complete their head counts throughout the night of the escape, but they failed to notice the three dummies. Inmates were roused from their sleep as usual the next morning. While doing a head count as the men stood by the bars of their cells, one guard had trouble waking up the Anglin brothers. He slapped one, only to see the dummy fly off the pillow and onto the floor. The flesh-tone dummies with real hair had fooled the night guards.

At 7:15 AM on June 12, 1962, the prison went into lockdown and a siren alerted everyone on Alcatraz of an escape. An all-points bulletin was issued at 8 AM, and an intensive search for the three desperados began. The guards unlocked the men's empty cells and followed the trail from the fake grill to the utility corridor and the hole where ductwork should have been. They also found the men's stash of materials for their escape, including glue, a handmade periscope, and cut up raincoats. A trail of footprints and scents that bloodhounds picked up led down to the beach. The guards found the paddle that the men had dropped during their escape and the life jacket for West—who would subsequently take credit in interviews for planning the escape.

## MANHUNT

Authorities launched one of the largest manhunts since the Lindbergh kidnapping. The Bureau of Prisons in Washington, D.C., called in the

U.S. Coast Guard, the California Highway Patrol, the U.S. Army, the State Harbor Police, and the police departments of San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Tiburon, Sausalito, and San Rafael. An intensive air, sea, and land search was launched. The Coast Guard provided a helicopter and four patrol boats, and the U.S. Army sent 35 military police and more than 100 men from Fort Baker to comb Angel Island for clues.

FBI agents in eight power cruisers searched the Marin County shoreline from Belvedere to the Golden Gate Bridge for several days. Other agents contacted boat owners in the area and people working along the shore to keep a lookout for the trio. FBI agents also conducted a door-to-door search in Sausalito and Tiburon while divers searched around Alcatraz. The FBI also checked the missing men's records and their previous escape attempts. They spent two weeks photographing evidence and interviewing prisoners and officers to piece together how three men had managed to plan an escape and assemble what they needed to follow through—under the unsuspecting noses of prison guards and officials.

A paddle that matched the one found on the prison's roof was discovered on June 12 floating off Angel Island. FBI agents immediately wondered if the men had managed to reach their destination, but a thorough search turned up nothing. Two days after the prison break, a boat belonging to the U.S. Corps of Engineers picked up two double-wrapped bags between Alcatraz and Angel islands. They were made from black raincoats. Inside one of them were sheets of paper with a list of names and addresses, more than 60 photos of the Anglin family and friends, a letter addressed to Clarence, and a prison receipt for a \$10 money order with his name on it.

A homemade life vest like the one left behind for West at the prison washed up on Fort Cronkhite Beach about three miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge. Another life jacket turned up a week later. Both had a torn seam. Teeth marks were found on the second jacket's inflation tube, as though someone had tried to keep the jacket inflated with his teeth clenched to the tube. The FBI repaired and tested the jackets. They only remained inflated for an hour, while the airtight one for West stayed inflated for several hours.

Morris and the Anglins had no money. West said that the plan was to steal clothes and a car once they reached land. Every robbery that occurred in Northern California for the next few weeks was carefully examined for signs of the prisoners, but nothing turned up. There were

no reports of stolen boats or the vehicles. FBI agents interviewed the men's relatives for hints of their whereabouts, but the families didn't appear to have the financial means to support the men.

During the time at which the men are believed to have launched their raft off the shore of Alcatraz, the water level in San Francisco Bay was at its peak within the 24-hour cycle of tides and water rushing out quickly towards the Pacific Ocean. Roe and Cole escaped under similar circumstances in 1937—and their bodies never turned up. Did Morris and the Anglins make it across the bay, reach Angel Island, and then cross the strait into Marin County as planned? Or did they disappear under the weight of the wind and the waves?

The raft never surfaced, and neither did any physical evidence linked to the men. The trio had vanished without a trace. Prison authorities believed that the men drowned, but none of the bodies turned up. In 1970 Rachel Anglin began proceedings to have her sons declared legally dead. The FBI remained active on the case for 17 years, until it was officially closed in 1979. Although Alcatraz had been slated for closure before the escape, the prison break accelerated its demise. It shut down on March 23, 1963, but not before John Paul Scott and Darl Dee Parker escaped on December 16, 1962. The men were later picked up and returned to Alcatraz.

West was transferred from Alcatraz to a prison in Washington State on February 6, 1963, and then to Atlanta where he was released from federal prison on January 7, 1965. He continued to be in and out of prison, and he died of peritonitis at age 49 on December 21, 1978, after complaining of abdominal pains. A year later, actor Clint Eastwood starred as Morris in the 1979 film *Escape from Alcatraz*.

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Mary Pinchot Meyer, a Washington painter who allegedly had a secret affair with U.S. president John F. Kennedy, was murdered a year after his assassination. AP Photo.

## Presidential Friend: The Murder of Mary Pinchot Meyer (1964)

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*The alleged affair of Mary Eno Pinchot Meyer with a former U.S. president and her murder remained cloaked in secrecy until a tabloid broke the story more than 10 years later. However, the media coverage shed no light on the motive behind the killing—nor the culprit.*

Mary Eno Pinchot Meyer propped up her latest painting, a round canvas with four colors shaped like the wedges of a pie. Then she put on a light blue angora sweater and headed out for her daily walk. Her studio in Washington, D.C.'s, upscale Georgetown neighborhood was a converted garage behind the red brick house owned by her brother-in-law and sister, Ben and Tony Bradlee.

Meyer was born into a wealthy family on October 14, 1920, in New York City. She was the daughter of lawyer Amos Pinchot and the niece of former Pennsylvania governor Gifford Pinchot, who had been named the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service by Teddy Roosevelt. As a teenager in the 1930s, the attractive blue-eyed blonde modeled clothes and hairstyles for *Vogue*. She graduated from Vassar College in 1942 and became a feature writer for the United Press.

She married Yale graduate Cord Meyer on April 19, 1945. The decorated former Marine had served in the Pacific until June 1944, when a Japanese grenade landed in his foxhole on Guam and exploded in front of him. He lost an eye. He was awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. By the time he joined the Central Intelligence Agency in 1951, the couple had three sons. Quentin was born in January 1946, Michael arrived in 1947, and Mark followed in 1950. Mary turned to abstract painting and attended art classes at American University in Washington, D.C. The couple's friends were prominent Washington families, including then Massachusetts senator John F. Kennedy and his wife, Jackie, who became neighbors in 1955.

Tragedy struck the Meyers on December 18, 1956, when nine-year-old Michael was killed by a car as he crossed the road. It was near the same spot that the family's golden retriever had been hit a few years earlier. By the time the ambulance arrived, Michael was already dead. Mary and Cord never recovered. They separated less than a year later, and she filed for divorce in 1958. Sons Quentin and Mark went to boarding school.

It was a warm and sunny fall day on October 12, 1964, when Mary Pinchot Meyer set off for her daily walk along the towpath of the old Chesapeake and Ohio canal in Georgetown. The towpath is a pedestrian and cycling route that parallels the Potomac River. She crossed

a footbridge that connected Georgetown with the towpath and passed the ruins of an old lime kiln as well as the city's oldest surviving boat club. Then the path became secluded.

A jogger noticed a black man wearing a light-colored jacket, a dark golf-type hat, and dark slacks walking behind Meyer. At 12:25 PM someone shot her in the head at close range. She instinctively brought a gloved hand up to her temple as she fell to her knees. The shooter wanted to get her out of sight of Canal Road. She struggled and fought him, clinging to a small cottonwood tree as he dragged her on her knees toward the dense woods. Her slacks tore at the knee and she bruised it. "Someone help me," she screamed weakly. The second gunshot, 10 seconds after the first one, sliced through her shoulder blade and severed the artery that carries blood to the heart. She died instantly, two days before her forty-fourth birthday, leaving behind sons Quentin, 18, and Mark 14.

At the same moment, mechanics Henry Wiggins and William Branch were stepping out of their towtruck on Canal Road above the path. They had been asked to repair a vehicle that was parked on the street. They heard a woman scream, and then two shots rang out. Wiggins was a Korean War veteran and former Military Policeman. He walked over to the wall that separated the road from a view of the canal and path below. When he looked over the stone wall at the scene below, he saw a black man about 120 feet away wearing a light tan jacket and dark cap leaning over the body. While Branch kept watch, Wiggins drove back to the Esso station where the two men worked and called police.

## **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

When the officers arrived about four minutes after the shots rang out, they sealed off the exits to the towpath. The only escape available was by running west or swimming across the Potomac River. While more than a dozen police searched the area on foot, Officer Rick Sylvis saw a black man poke his head out of the woods at 12:45 PM, less than a mile from the body.

Half an hour later, Officer John Warner spotted a black man 30 feet ahead of him as he was checking a cement culvert about 500 feet from the scene of the murder. The man, who was wet, was wearing a white t-shirt and black pants that were torn and unzipped. His right hand was bleeding. He explained that he had lost his fishing rod when he fell

asleep. When he woke up, he fell in the water while trying to retrieve it and cut his hand on some rocks. He brought the police officer to his fishing spot, which was 10 feet below the murder scene. Witness Wiggins saw him and said that he was the man he had seen leaning over Meyer's body.

Laborer Raymond Crump, 25, denied that he had any knowledge of the murder. Police did not find a weapon or a fishing rod, but he was arrested and handcuffed. He was arraigned before a U.S. Commissioner and held without bail on a charge of murder. Later that afternoon, police discovered a torn light tan jacket floating in the Potomac River near the murder. A dark plaid cap turned up the next day, and Crump's wife identified the clothing as his. The evening of the murder police found a fishing pole and fishing box in a closet at his house.

Forty police officers combed the area around the scene of Meyer's murder for two days, searching for the .38-caliber Smith & Wesson gun that had killed her. The U.S. Park Police drained the canal and navy divers searched the bottom of the Potomac River for the murder weapon, but it was never found. In the week following her murder, someone placed a white cross at the spot where she was killed.

Meyer had left her studio without a purse or any piece of identification on her. The only clue to her identity was the name Meyer on the inside of one of her leather gloves. Police spent hours phoning all of the Meyers in Washington, D.C., until they learned that the victim was the sister-in-law of *Newsweek's* Washington bureau chief Ben Bradlee. He identified her body the evening after her murder. Since Meyer was not carrying a purse, police discounted robbery as a motive for the killing.

Pierre Salinger, press secretary to the late President John F. Kennedy, phoned the Bradlees from Paris to offer his condolences. Meyer's closest friend, artist Anne Truitt, called from her home in Tokyo, where she and journalist husband James Truitt were living. She asked the Bradlees if they had found Meyer's diary, and the Bradlees said they had not looked for it. According to Truitt and friend Cicely Angleton, Meyer said that if anything ever happened to her she wanted her diary entrusted to CIA counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton. Bradlee was not convinced that this was indeed Meyer's intention.

The next morning, Ben and Tony Bradlee walked a few blocks to Meyer's house on Thirty-Fourth Street to look for the diary. Versions of events then differ. In his memoirs Ben Bradlee said that they were surprised to find James Angleton (husband of her friend Cicely Angleton) inside her house when they arrived, but Truitt and Cicely Angleton said

that Tony, the Angletons, and another friend of Meyer's searched together. Regardless of who was there that day, they couldn't locate the diary.

They later went to her studio behind the Bradlee home. Amid the paintings covering the space, Tony found the diary and some papers bundled together. It measured about 6 × 8 inches and was filled with 50 to 60 pages. She and her husband read them before passing them on to James Angleton to burn at the CIA headquarters. They did so, believing that the CIA had the facilities to safely dispose of it. They later learned, however, that Angleton had burned the loose papers but not the diary itself. He returned it to Tony years later. She burned it in the presence of Anne Truitt as a witness.

## AFFAIR REVEALED

The Bradlees were stunned by what they learned when they read Meyer's diary. About 10 pages described a love affair that she had been having with John F. Kennedy while he was president of the United States. He had been assassinated less than 11 months before Meyer was murdered. Just two weeks earlier, the Warren Commission into Kennedy's assassination had released its report concluding that Lee Harvey Oswald had acted alone when he shot the president. Upon reading the diary, it was the first time that Meyer's sister and brother-in-law learned of the affair. The Bradlees were friends of the Kennedys and had often dined alone with them at the White House. They felt betrayed by the infidelity and the deceit of learning of the affair after both parties were dead.

Meyer, they learned, had visited Kennedy at the White House residence for the first time in October 1961. Jackie Kennedy was away with her children in Newport, Rhode Island, at the time. Meyer signed in at about 7:30 PM on 15 occasions between October 1961 and August 1963, always when Jackie was away from Washington, but the lovers may have also spent time together at homes in Georgetown. Their sexual relationship began in January 1962 and would continue for nearly two years.

Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas on November 22, 1963. In the ensuing months, Meyer had the impression that someone had been entering her house. In January, a maid found the garden doors open while Mary and her sons were sleeping upstairs. On another occasion a heavy wooden door was found ajar in the basement. It was a door that she

and her sons were not able to open without help. Angleton later claimed that concern for the president's reputation is what led him to search for Meyer's diary of the affair.

On what would have been Meyer's forty-fourth birthday, 200 people gathered inside the National Cathedral's Bethlehem Chapel to pay their last respects on October 14, 1964. White lilies and chrysanthemums framed the altar. Her younger sister Tony sat beside their mother, former journalist Ruth Pickering Pinchot. Mary Pinchot Meyer was buried in Milford, Pennsylvania, near her son Michael and her father Amos.

## TRIAL

The next day, Crump's mother, Martha, hired respected Washington, D.C., criminal lawyer Dovey Roundtree. That morning, the U.S. Attorney presented his case before a grand jury, and Crump was indicted for first-degree murder. Prosecutors dispensed with a preliminary hearing, opting to take the case directly to trial. The trial began in U.S. District Court on July 20, 1965, before Judge Howard Corcoran and a jury of eight women and four men.

Prosecutor Alfred Hantman thought that he had a straightforward circumstantial case despite the fact that there was neither blood nor a weapon linking the defendant to the victim. He told jurors that Ray Crump was found soaking wet about 500 feet from the victim's body just 45 minutes after the shooting. He had blood on his head and hand. Hantman recounted that the accused had claimed he was fishing, yet no fishing pole was found. His jacket was found beside the water 600 feet from the body, his cap another 400 feet farther away. The pants and shoes he wore that day matched those seen by the witness.

The prosecution believed that Crump ran through the woods for about a mile. First he dropped his cap and then his jacket into the river, poked his head out of the woods, and then spotted a police officer. He ran back east towards and then past the victim's body by about 500 feet. He got wet trying to swim around an open culvert before running into Officer Warner on the trolley tracks. Henry Wiggins was the prosecution's star witness. He testified that he heard Meyer's screams and then two gunshots. When he reported the shooting, Wiggins told police that the black man he saw standing over her body was wearing a light tan jacket and dark cap, stood about five feet eight inches tall, and weighed about 185 pounds.

Crump, however, measured five feet five and a half inches and weighed just 145 pounds. On cross-examination, Roundtree focused on the discrepancy between the initial report and the small man being accused. She hammered home to jurors in her closing statement that Crump was just “a little man.” Crump never explained why he dropped his hat and jacket into the Potomac River, but he did give his lawyer another version of events. He told Roundtree that he had gone to the towpath with a prostitute, and Roundtree decided not to put Crump on stand. He had offered conflicting stories about why he was at the towpath, and she didn’t want to give the prosecution ammunition to rip apart her case.

Hantman called 27 witnesses and presented nearly 50 pieces of evidence, but none tied Crump directly to the murder. Nobody could establish what happened on the towpath before or during the crime. On July 30, 1965, after deliberating for a total of 11 hours, jurors returned with a verdict of not guilty. “Raymond Crump, you are a free man,” Judge Corcoran said.

Meyer’s secret romance with Kennedy remained a private affair until the *National Enquirer* published a front-page story on February 23, 1976. The article was titled “Former Vice President of *Washington Post* Reveals . . . JFK 2-year White House Romance.” Jim Truitt, Anne’s ex-husband, said that Mary and Jack had met 20 to 30 times in the White House during their romance. Why she was gunned down less than a year after Kennedy’s assassination and by whom still remains a mystery.

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Valerie Percy was murdered while her father was campaigning for election to the U.S. Senate.  
Bettmann/Corbis.

## **The Millionaire's Daughter: The Murder of Valerie Percy (1966)**

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*The investigation into the murder of Valerie Percy illustrates the extent to which different law enforcement agencies must sometimes work together to gather clues in an effort to try to solve a case. It also highlights the murky world of prison informants and their impact on police investigations.*

Twenty-one-year-old, blonde-haired Valerie Jean Percy was a great asset to her father's election campaign. Charles Harting Percy, 47, had worked his way up from near poverty to become a millionaire. He had risen from a \$12-a-week job as a clerk to become president of camera manufacturer Bell & Howell Company at the age of 29 and a millionaire at 40. He resigned as chairman of the board to devote himself full time to running for the U.S. Senate. A Republican, he was trying to unseat Illinois democratic senator Paul H. Douglas, 74.

Percy had previously made an unsuccessful bid to defeat Illinois governor Otto Kerner in 1964. The November 8, 1966, race for the Senate was tight. Senator Douglas had served three terms and was Percy's former economics professor 25 years earlier at the University of Chicago, but Percy was determined to make a run for the job, and his daughter was helping with his campaign. She had graduated from the Ivy League Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, the previous June with a bachelor's degree, majoring in French literature. She had spent her junior year in Paris and planned to enter Johns Hopkins University in the fall for a master of arts in teaching, for which she had received a scholarship.

The modest and unassuming young woman was a good student. While at Cornell, she had been a member of the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority and participated in several student organizations. They included the student government's academic affairs committee and the international committee of the student union's Willard Straight Hall. She regularly dated Andrew Potash, senior class president, during her final year. He worked for her father during the summer, and the New York City native was planning to study at the London School of Economics in the fall.

Valerie Percy came home for the summer to work on her father's campaign, and she was an effective worker at his Chicago headquarters. She set up 22 campaign centers in the area, recruited hundreds of young volunteers, and made speeches for Chuck Percy. "Valerie is my best precinct worker," he told a rally of campaign workers on September 17, 1966.

Meanwhile, Valerie and stepmother Loraine were entertaining key campaign workers Calvin Fentriss and Tully Friedman at the family's

home in the suburb of Kenilworth. The Percys lived in a 17-room, Tudor-style mansion called Windward that sat on a three-acre lake-front estate on Lake Michigan. Fentriss had been a full-time member of Percy's staff since the aspiring senator's gubernatorial bid in 1964, while Friedman was the director of the campaign's Neighborhood Headquarters Program. Over dinner, they discussed how they could appeal to young voters.

The two campaign workers left at about 10 PM. Valerie went up to her room, changed into her pajamas, and sat up in bed to watch television. Twin sister Sharon returned home from a date at about 11:30 PM, and she went to Valerie's room to return a raincoat that she had borrowed.

After his campaign appearance in Chicago, Chuck Percy returned to his \$230,000 estate at about midnight. Valerie and Sharon were each in their bedrooms just down the hall from the master bedroom. Younger daughter Gail, 13, was asleep. Son Roger, 19, was away at university, and Mark, 11, was staying over at a friend's house. Charles and wife Loraine Percy, 37, watched television for about an hour before going to sleep at about 1:30 AM.

Loraine was half asleep just before dawn less than four hours later on September 18, 1966, when she heard the sound of breaking glass. Then she heard a clicking sound as though someone with hard heels were walking across a tile floor. Thinking that perhaps one of the Percy daughters had knocked a water glass off their nightstand, she went back to sleep.

## MURDER IN THE MANSION

Moments later, Loraine awakened to the sound of someone moaning. She quietly climbed out of bed and walked down the hall. Keeping an ear cocked, she realized that the sound was coming from Valerie's room. When she opened the door, she saw the figure of a man bent over her stepdaughter's blood-soaked bed. She gasped. The intruder, who was shining his light on Valerie's body, turned and beamed the flashlight into Loraine's eyes. Momentarily blinded, she took a step back. The dark-haired man was wearing a checkered shirt, stood about 5 feet 8 inches tall, and weighed about 160 pounds.

Then Loraine turned and ran back to her bedroom and pressed the central burglar alarm button that activated a siren on the roof of the house at 5:05 AM. Her screams woke her husband. Meanwhile, the killer fled down the stairs and ran out through the French doors leading from the music room to the patio. The family Labrador Retriever Li Foo

(Chinese for “guardian”) did not bark at the intruder. With so many campaign workers coming in and out of the house, the dog had learned to ignore everyone but men in uniforms.

When Chuck Percy reached his daughter’s room seconds later, he turned on the light and realized that she was near death. She had been hit on the head twice and repeatedly stabbed in the face, chest, and stomach 10 times. Loraine Percy felt a faint pulse and used a pillowcase to carefully dab blood from Valerie’s face. Her husband phoned neighbor Dr. Robert Hohf, a surgeon who worked at Evanston Hospital, to come and examine Valerie.

Hohf pulled on a pair of pants over his pajamas and raced to the Percy home. He rushed up the circular staircase to the second floor and entered Valerie’s bedroom at about 5:10 AM. She was lying across the bloodstained covers of her bed. The young woman had been stabbed in the face six times, once in the neck, twice in the chest, and twice in the stomach. Blows to the head with a heavy object had left four cone-shaped puncture wounds in her skull. Hohf walked back downstairs to the living room where Chuck, Loraine, Sharon, and Gail were assembled and delivered the bad news to her family. There was nothing he could do; Valerie was dead.

By then, Kenilworth police chief Robert H. Daley was on his way to the Percy estate with a few crime laboratory technicians from Chicago, Chicago Police homicide sergeant James Moore, and Detective Hartwell McGuinn. Cook County coroner Andrew J. Toman and his assistant Sidney Berman also arrived. This was the first homicide in Kenilworth’s 75-year history since Chicago businessman Joseph Sears founded the suburb in the early 1890s. Daley had contacted Chicago police superintendent Orlando W. Wilson for help with the investigation in this community of nearly 2,800 people. Daley and his 11 men also received assistance throughout the investigation from the Cook County state’s attorney investigators under the direction of Lieutenant Nicholas Juric, six Illinois State Police detectives commanded by Lieutenant Richard Robb, sheriff’s deputies, and FBI agents.

## **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

Police discovered that the intruder had come through a flagstone patio, cut out a four-inch square section from a screen door, and used glass cutters to remove a piece of pane from the glass of a French door that stood between the music room and the patio. The person then

reached through the opening to unlock the door and entered the house. He walked across the tiled floor of the music room and climbed the 18 steps of the staircase to Valerie's room on the second floor.

Detectives did not understand the motive for the killing. The intruder had not stolen any money, jewelry, or other valuables from the victim's room. Police questioned family members, friends, the maid, and live-in butler, but nobody could think of anyone who would want to harm Valerie. Police found fingerprints on the pane of glass and the French door. Experts at the Chicago Police Crime Laboratory said that three prints were found on two pieces of glass that had been removed from the door. Only one print was clear enough to be useful, however, and it did not match those of any family members or people who came to the house. Police also found five bloody palm prints left on the banister as the killer fled down the stairs and out of the house.

A funeral service for Valerie Percy was held on September 20, 1966, at Kenilworth Union Church. The Percys were devout Christian Scientists and funeral services are not usually held in churches. However, her father wanted a place to accommodate a large number of mourners. Some 400 people came to pay their respects. Pink roses, Valerie's favorite flowers, decorated the oak altar. This was the family's second tragedy. Valerie's mother, Jeanne, died in 1947 after a violent reaction to drugs, following an apparently simple and successful operation. Percy married the former Loraine Guyer in 1950.

Mr. and Mrs. Percy, Valerie's twin sister, Sharon, her younger sister, Gail, 12, brothers Roger, 19, and Mark, 11, sat through the memorial service. Also in attendance was former classmate and boyfriend Andrew Potash, 21. He had flown home from the University of Sussex in England the night before. After the memorial service, the family drove to the graveyard of Christ Episcopal Church in Winnetka where Valerie's ashes were buried.

The Percy family fled their Kenilworth home the following day and slipped away from Chicago into seclusion. Campaign Manager Thomas J. Houser announced that all Percy campaign offices would stay closed until further notice. When he received news of the murder of his opponent's daughter, Senator Douglas sent him a message that read, "My heart goes out to you over your cruel and terrible loss. I am calling off all campaigning." Percy responded, saying "It is impossible for me to say at this time when I will be able to resume my own candidacy. Whenever you resume your campaign, I will understand completely."

The election campaign was halted but the police investigation continued. Police believed that the killer wanted to rid himself of the murder weapons as soon as possible and may have tossed them into nearby Lake Michigan. They hoped to find the glasscutter, the object the killer used to hit Valerie in the head, and the weapon used to stab her.

Scuba divers with the Coast Guard dressed in rubber suits and combed the lake's sandy bottom off the Percy family's private beach. They used an improvised dragnet that consisted of a heavy iron bar five feet long with six magnets attached like studs. The bar was attached to sturdy lines and dragged along the bottom of the lake. The men swept the beach for nearly four hours, wading a few steps, pulling up the bar to check it, and returning it to the bottom of the lake.

Chief Boatswain's Mate Leo Gross said that he found a "hotspot" about 35 feet from the shore in about four feet of water. The dragline registered an object at the sandy bottom of the lake, but magnets couldn't grab and retrieve it. A diver would go underwater to retrieve the object, which would be displaced several feet from the spot by turbulent waves. Severe squalls made it impossible for them to bring the object to the surface. The Coast Guard was eventually able to retrieve an old army bayonet from the water, but there was no indication whether it had been used to stab the victim.

Police were following other leads as well. The morning of the murder, investigators had found the footprints of bare feet leading between the Percy home and the family's private beach on Lake Michigan. This led them to believe that the murderer had fled towards the beach. Neighbor Nydia Hohf, who lived just south of the Percy house, had been awakened by the siren wailing from the roof of the Percy home at 5:05 AM just after the murder occurred. She grabbed her robe and ran into her backyard. From her view of the south side of the Percy home and their private beach, she didn't see anyone.

A cab driver told police that he saw a green station wagon coming from Devonshire Lane just after the siren from the Percy home sounded. The Percys lived at 40 Devonshire Lane, a street that was only about a block long. Detectives located the driver and cleared him of suspicion. It turned out that he had merely used the family's driveway at 5:30 AM to turn around.

Police focused their investigation on people who were familiar with the Percy family home. They included three campaign workers, one of whom was dismissed that summer for drinking. The others were barred from further visits to the house, but the reasons were not disclosed publicly.

Detectives interviewed scores of people who were familiar with the house's layout, but no viable suspects turned up. An address book that they found in Valerie's bedroom offered no new leads. Police also talked to every campaign worker and anyone who had applied to work on Charles Percy's campaign but were not accepted. No information that could help the investigation turned up.

Two close friends of Valerie Percy who had dined with her the night before her murder agreed to take lie detector tests. Tully Friedman, 24, passed the polygraph test while Calvin Fentress III, 28, was so nervous that his test results were inconclusive. Neither of them were considered suspects.

## SEARCH FOR SUSPECTS

Investigators began looking further afield for leads. On September 20, 1966, detectives in nearby Evanston gave Kenilworth police a sketch of a burglar who was being sought in an unsolved case that had occurred on June 30. As with the Percy murder, the intruder entered the home in the early hours of the morning, went directly to a girl's bedroom, and hit her on the head with a blunt instrument. In that case, 19-year-old Sharon Bubes screamed and her assailant fled without killing her.

Ten days later, David R. Mumbaugh, 18, was arraigned in Arizona on charges of first-degree murder in the fatal September 21 stabbing of 20-year-old Laura Bernstein. The Arizona State University student was from Fair Lawn, New Jersey. Chicago police forwarded the fingerprints found in the Percy murder, but they were not a match with Mumbaugh.

Tool and die maker Michael Lee Herrington, 23, was arrested on November 11 and charged with the September 4 knife slaying of Julia Beckwith, 10, and the October 17 killing of Sherryl Thompson, 18, both in Milwaukee—about 80 miles from Kenilworth. He was also charged with attempted murder in the stabbing of 11-year-old Kathleen Dreyer on her way to school November 11. Kenilworth police got in touch with the Milwaukee police about a possible connection to the Valerie Percy murder, but none was found.

The 11 officers of the Kenilworth police were working 13- to 14-hour days in an effort to track down Valerie Percy's killer. Another 11 investigators were involved in the case full time, but they were no closer to solving it. By the end of September, more than 30 investigators were involved and the investigation's headquarters moved from the cramped Kenilworth police station to the one in Winnetka three miles north.



Charles Percy returned home on the evening of October 4, 1966, to resume campaigning for a Senate seat after two weeks of seclusion in California. "This is what I must do and it is what my family wants me to do," he said at a news conference the following day, but he planned to do so at a more moderate pace to spend time with his wife, Loraine, daughters, Sharon and Gail, and two sons. He also thanked his opponent for acting "generously, graciously, and with understanding" since Valerie's murder.

Senator Douglas announced that he would resume his campaign as well since suspending it the day that Valerie Percy was found dead. By then, police had checked out more than 500 leads and questioned some 350 people. As the investigation began its fourth week, police still didn't have any significant leads to the murderer. Percy was elected to the U.S. Senate in November 1966. He sold the Kenilworth estate; Loraine was too frightened to stay there. After moving to Washington, D.C., Percy offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of his daughter's killer, but the money was never claimed.

Eighteen months after the murder, on March 18, 1968, Kenilworth police chief Edward Eggert ended the full-time investigation into the case. One state policeman would work part-time on it with the help of one Kenilworth policeman, as needed. In the first two years after the murder, police interviewed some 10,000 people and investigated 1,226 suspects including burglars, drug addicts, boyfriends, former boyfriends, employees, and campaign staff workers. Over the years, they also checked out the false confessions of 19 men, but none were linked to the murder. One confession included an 18-year-old Arizona man who told Tucson police that a stranger had paid him \$75 to kill anyone in the Percy house. FBI agents concluded that the sailor was nowhere near the home at the time of the slaying.

## FRESH LEADS

In 1970, Harold James "Jimmy" Evans, 24, said that Frederick J. "Freddie" Malchow had confessed to killing Valerie Percy when the two men were cellmates in the Montgomery County, Pennsylvania Jail. Malchow was a career thief who would commit burglaries and then hop on a plane to return home. At the time of the alleged confession, Malchow was in jail awaiting trial for rape and robbery in connection with a home invasion in Norristown. According to Evans, Malchow said that he flew from Texas to burglarize the Percy home but Valerie

woke up while he was in her room. He pushed her down on the bed with one hand and stabbed her with the other. By the time the story had surfaced, however, Malchow was dead. He had escaped from Norristown jail in the spring of 1967 and plunged to his death from a railroad trestle over the Schuylkill River when police were about to recapture him.

Seven years after the murder, another lead popped up. By then, Illinois state police had interviewed more than 14,000 people, spent over \$300,000, and painstakingly pursued 1,317 leads. This lead looked promising. A woman alleged that her former boyfriend, convicted burglar Francis Leroy Hohimer, 46, was the killer. Hohimer and Malchow were members of a gang of burglars that roamed coast to coast from 1965 to 1967 robbing the homes of the wealthy. Both men were believed to have violent dispositions. Hohimer favored a propane blowtorch during his heists, which he used to enter homes and threaten reluctant robbery victims. Malchow was arrested numerous times on such charges as rape and assault.

By 1973, Hohimer was serving a 30-year sentence at the Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison. The day after the Percy murder, he reportedly told his brother Harold Wayne Hohimer that he got into some trouble during a break-in and had to kill someone. In 1972, crime syndicate member Leo Rugendorf, 58, had told two *Chicago Sun-Times* reporters that Hohimer had confessed to the killing. Robert Stanfield, 29, an acquaintance of Hohimer's, disclosed that Hohimer had informed him two weeks before the murder that he had cased the mansion and intended to rob the Percys.

When police questioned Hohimer, he said that he wasn't even at the scene of the murder. He initially blamed Norman Jackson, a member of his gang. Before Jackson could be questioned, however, he died mysteriously after plunging from a Chicago building. Then Hohimer claimed that it was Malchow, another member of his gang and not Jackson, who killed Percy. He said that Malchow and gang members Evans and William Jackson came to his Chicago apartment for a change of clothes the day of the murder. Hohimer burned Malchow's bloody clothes.

Illinois State police agent Robert Lamb believed that Malchow was the killer and that he had acted alone. He committed his burglaries at night and was in Chicago at the time of the murder. However, four palm prints found at the Percy mansion were not Hohimer's or Malchow's, and there was no physical evidence linking Percy's murder

to Malchow or Hohimer. More than 40 years later, this murder remains unsolved.

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American Jim Thompson revitalized Thailand's silk industry before he vanished in the Cameron Highlands. By permission of the James H. W. Thompson Foundation, Bangkok.

# Material Man: The Disappearance of Jim Thompson (1967)

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*The case of Jim Thompson illustrates how theories can abound in an effort to explain a baffling disappearance, particularly when the victim is a former intelligence officer.*

Jim Thompson was ready for a holiday in the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia. He had come a long way since his childhood in Greenville, Delaware. James Harrison Wilson “Jim” Thompson was born March 21, 1906, the youngest of five children. His maternal grandfather, James Harrison Wilson, became an army Major General at the age of 27. His father was president of the United States Finishing Company, which printed cottons in mass production. From 1931 to 1940, Thompson was a practicing architect, but he failed to pass the New York architectural board exams.

Thompson joined the U.S. Army at the beginning of World War II. At the urging of Captain Edwin Black, he became a member of the newly formed Office of Strategic Services, a forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency. In 1945, he began training for several weeks in the jungles of what is now Sri Lanka to prepare for the liberation of Thailand from Japanese control. As he and his comrades were flying to Thailand, word reached them that Japan had surrendered. The plane continued on to Bangkok, however, where Thompson took on the role of OSS station chief. He also set up a temporary American consulate until a permanent one could be established. After being discharged from the army in 1946, he decided to stay in Thailand because he had fallen in love with the country and its people.

It was not long before Thompson discovered his true calling in life. The northeast region of Thailand produced some raw silk, but competition from cheaper, machine-made fabrics produced in Europe and Japan had significantly diminished the demand for Thailand’s raw silk. Thompson saw potential in the tiny industry, which was on the verge of extinction. He showed samples to designers, decorators, and fashion editors in New York. They raved about the product. Then he hired 200 silk weavers in Thailand to create finished products from raw silk and dyes. The brightly colored, hand-woven silk gained popularity, and silk shops began springing up around Bangkok; by 1965 there were 156. The growing Thai silk industry began garnering international attention and media coverage in *Reader’s Digest*, *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, and the *New York Times*. Fashion designers such as Balmain also began using the material. The cast of the musical *The King and I* wore Thai silk that Thompson had developed.

By 1958, the industry had expanded to the point that Thompson's Thai Silk Company was selling its products to more than 17 countries. Sales had grown from \$36,000 in 1948 to \$650,000 in 1957. By 1967, national and international sales had grown to \$1.5 million. The number of Thais earning their living from silk weaving rose from a few in 1945 to 20,000 by 1967.

Along the way, Thompson became known as the Thai Silk King, and by then he had also assembled an enviable art collection and built a home that still stands today as a landmark in Bangkok. He seamlessly wove together six traditional Thai teak houses into one, placing them on stilts to protect his home from storms and flooding. He was a soft-spoken man of medium height, with blue eyes, and he was a heavy smoker. He worked hard for his success, waking up early to visit silk weavers and often not getting to sleep until 11 PM or midnight. This eligible bachelor's personal fortune was estimated to be worth about \$1 million.

The first few months of 1967 were particularly busy for Thompson. On March 17, 1967, the new two-story building that was to house his silk business in Bangkok finally had its grand opening. A few days later, Thompson celebrated his sixty-first birthday with friends on March 21 before packing his bags and boarding a flight to Malaysia on March 23. He had accepted an invitation from friends Dr. T. G. and Helen Ling to visit the Cameron Highlands. This pretty resort area was located more than 5,000 feet above sea level and about 140 miles north of Kuala Lumpur. It was surrounded by wild jungle terrain and deep, hidden ravines.

The Lings lived in Singapore. Dr. Ling was Chinese, and his American wife ran her own antiques store. It would be a short visit, however. On Easter Monday Thompson was planning to go to Singapore to attend business meetings with an American businessman who was considering starting up a fabric industry there and was seeking advice. He was to dine with the businessman and the American ambassador in the evening.

## **HOLIDAY IN THE CAMERON HIGHLANDS**

Thompson was travelling to the Cameron Highlands with Connie Mangskau, a half-English, half-Thai friend whom he had met in 1945 when he worked for the army and she was an interpreter for

Allied forces. When they arrived at Bangkok Airport to fly to Penang, Thompson realized that he had failed to get his cholera shot, which was required to enter Malaysia. He also had not brought a Thai tax clearance certificate. A health official at the airport agreed to give him the cholera shot and backdate the certificate to meet Malaysia's six-day requirement. For her part, Mangskau signed a form promising to pay any outstanding taxes that Thompson owed should he fail to return home from the trip.

When Thompson and Mangskau arrived in Penang, they stayed overnight in George Town, the island's main city. The day of their arrival, they checked into the Ambassador Hotel and had a taxi take them on a sightseeing tour around the island. They returned to the hotel afterwards in time for Thompson to get a haircut—another task that he had neglected to do in the busy months leading up to this trip. Thompson and his traveling companion met for cocktails, went out for supper at an Indian restaurant, and went for a walk. The following morning they went shopping. The taxi that they had hired to drive them to the Highlands picked them up just after 11 AM.

On their way to take the ferry to the mainland, the taxi driver stopped his vehicle and jumped out without warning his passengers. He ran into a nearby building and emerged five minutes later with another man who, he explained, would be their driver. The unexpected stop was a minor inconvenience that Thompson and Mangskau tolerated. When they reached the town of Tapah, their driver asked them to change taxis. The road climbed steeply to the resort and he said that his car had developed engine trouble and would not be able to make the steep climb. Mangskau complained when she realized that the second taxi already had two Chinese passengers inside. She and Thompson had paid for a private car—not a shared taxi that would be cramped with five people. The driver of the second taxi agreed. The other passengers removed their bags and Mangskau and Thompson completed their trip. They arrived at the Ling's Moonlight Cottage at about 5:30 PM on Good Friday.

The cottage was a semi-Tudor bungalow that sat on a hill surrounded by thick jungle. A covered veranda just off the living room had a gravel path that led along the lawn and down a narrow, twisting road to a golf course. The three-bedroom house had a large garden around three sides. It was in Tanah Rata, which had more of an English than a Malaysian feel to it. The town had neat bungalows, hotels, a golf course, and an Anglican church carved from the jungle.

Dr. Ling was waiting for Thompson and Mangskau. His wife arrived several hours later, after completing some business that had delayed her. Thompson woke up the next morning feeling well rested. After breakfast, he and Dr. Ling decided to try a new trail that led to the golf course. They agreed to meet the women at the club at 11 AM. When Mangskau and Mrs. Ling arrived at the appointed hour, however, the men were nowhere to be found. Soon after Dr. Ling and Thompson had begun walking along the trail, they got lost amid the tangled brush coming down the hill. Dr. Ling then tripped on a root and injured himself. They found their way to the golf course just before 1 PM after Thompson discovered a small stream and they followed it until they reached a familiar spot. After having a drink at the club, the foursome drove home for lunch.

On Easter Sunday, March 26, 1967, Thompson decided to walk down to the bottom of the hill from the cottage as the others prepared to attend services at the Anglican church in Tanah Rata. He met the rest of the group near the golf course about 15 minutes later. When the church service ended, they all went back to the Moonlight Cottage to pick up a picnic basket. Then they headed to a site at Mount Brinchang about 45 minutes away, spread a blanket on the grass, and ate from the hamper and thermos. But Thompson appeared to be in a hurry. As soon as they had finished eating, he started putting things back in the picnic hamper. Everyone returned to the cottage at about 2:30 PM and went to their respective rooms for a nap.

As Mangskau and the Lings went off to their rooms, Thompson stayed in the living room. The Lings left their bedroom window open to allow air to circulate. They heard their restless houseguest move an aluminum deck chair onto the veranda. Just after 3 PM they heard footsteps crunching on the gravel leading down the path to the road. They assumed that Thompson was taking a walk.

When Mangskau emerged from her room at 4:30 PM, Dr. Ling was reading in the living room and Thompson's suit jacket was slung over the back of a chair on the veranda. Strangely, he had left his cigarettes and lighter behind as well as the medication that he took to deal with pain from gallstone attacks. Everyone assumed that Thompson would be back shortly. Tea was served at 5 PM. There was still no sign of him by 6 PM. Dr. Ling wondered if he had walked down to the golf course, so he drove over there to check. Dr. Ling returned alone 15 minutes later. Thompson was not there and nobody had seen him there or on the road that afternoon.



## DISAPPEARANCE

The jungle in the highlands was difficult enough to navigate by day. When darkness fell, the sky turned into an inky black and the temperature dropped noticeably. By 7:30 PM that Easter Sunday, the Lings and Mangskau were worried. Friends that they called had neither seen nor heard from Thompson. Dr. Ling reported Thompson's disappearance to the police in Tanah Rata. They said that there was little they could do until sunrise; they would launch a full-scale search in the morning if he hadn't returned.

The Lings speculated that perhaps Thompson had stumbled and lost his bearings in the darkness or injured himself. A friend and British army major whose cocker spaniel had some training for hunting arrived to help. They first walked to a hornet's nest that Thompson was known to have gone to see twice. It was a 45-minute walk in daylight but took much longer under the cover of darkness. The searchers returned at midnight, having found no trace of Thompson. After having a rest, the two men went out and searched for several hours in a different direction.

The local police launched an official search about 15 hours after Thompson was last seen. By the end of the first day, nearly 100 people were involved in looking for the Thai Silk King, including the local police, a group of British soldiers on leave in the highlands, and guests from local hotels. Everyone was aware that the first day was crucial for finding Thompson and maximizing his safety, but the tangled jungle terrain and the fact that no one knew in which direction Thompson had gone made the situation more difficult. Searchers kept their eyes peeled for signs that someone had used the trails, such as flattened grass, broken branches, or bits of clothing.

In an effort to retrace Thompson's steps and establish his movements, police asked villagers if anyone had seen the missing man around 3:30 PM on Easter Sunday. A Malay cook in a Lutheran mission cottage near Moonlight cottage said that she was in the mission's kitchen at about 4 PM, when she saw a man resembling Thompson walk up the road, look at the garden, and retrace his steps.

By Tuesday, the search had expanded to include more than 300 policemen, about 30 aboriginal guides who lived in the jungle and knew its trails well, soldiers, hotel guests who helped the first day, and pupils from the Dalat American School for children of American missionaries from throughout Southeast Asia. In all, more than 400 people participated in the search. Due to the efforts of some of Thompson's influential

friends, several helicopters were sent to help look for him during the first week. Their usefulness was limited, however, as the thick jungle often prevented crews from seeing the ground.

On the second day of the search, a man who was a well-known bomoh (witch doctor) arrived and offered to use his powers to help. Almost every village has a bomoh who can be consulted on a range of problems from impotency to missing persons. While the man was in a trance, he announced that some evil spirits were holding Thompson in the jungle. The next day the bomoh said that Thompson was alive and well and being held under a tree. He pinpointed the spot on a map. The searchers went to look, but found no sign of Thompson. Undeterred, the bomoh claimed that the spirits had moved him and he would return on his own by 9 AM the following morning. Wednesday came and went with no sign of the missing man.

Searchers initially thought that Thompson was lost or injured and that they would find clues to his whereabouts the first day after he had vanished. When they did not, a new theory emerged by Wednesday or Thursday. Perhaps he had been kidnapped for ransom. This practice was fairly common at the time in Malaysia, particularly with victims who were Singapore Chinese. However, Europeans were not generally kidnapped. After the third day, searchers found no evidence that Thompson had gone into the jungle. Police concluded after five days that there was little hope Thompson was still alive—if he was, indeed, in the jungle.

Then a new lead emerged. A garage attendant claimed that on the day Thompson disappeared, he had seen a convoy of five cars bearing Thai license plates driving up the road to the highlands at 3:30 PM. They returned at about 5:30 PM, he said. This led to speculation that they were involved in Thompson's disappearance. After investigating the story, the Malaysian Criminal Intelligence Division (CID) concluded that the story never happened. According to border authorities, no Thai vehicles entered the country.

The Malaysian CID next turned its attention to Mangskau's story about her and Thompson switching drivers on the way to the highlands. Had this been a foiled attempt to kidnap the Thai Silk King? Officials learned that the first driver did not have a Malaysian license, so he found a friend who did. As for the second change, drivers coming from Penang often transferred passengers at Tapah to save on gas as well as wear and tear on their car. What may have appeared to be an unusual situation was, in fact, a common practice.

On the second day of the search for Thompson, his company announced plans to offer a reward of \$10,000 for information leading to his whereabouts. Over the following weeks, his friends increased the amount to \$25,000—including \$10,000 for proof of his death if he had come to an untimely end. The Lings were subsequently subjected to hoaxes by people who were trying to extort money. The day after the initial reward was posted, a man phoned Dr. Ling at his Singapore apartment and said that he had information about Thompson. He told Ling that Thompson was being held in a house near Tapah. If Ling came with him, they could arrange for a ransom, but the gentleman said that he needed money to get there. Ling gave him \$50 Malaysian and said that two friends would meet him instead. The man failed to show up at the appointed time and place.

More bomohs came to visit Moonlight Cottage, but the areas that they suggested for Thompson's location were searched to no avail. Police called off the search after 10 days and after having tried to locate Thompson within a 70-mile area of the cottage where he was last seen. But small groups of police went into the jungle whenever new leads arose. Local authorities estimated that "it would take a full regiment of men working for about a month to comb the area."

Desperate for leads on her brother's whereabouts, Thompson's sister hired Dutch-born mystic Peter Hurkos. He sat on the veranda of Moonlight Cottage and claimed that Thompson had been kidnapped by 14 men and brought to Cambodia for political motives. Richard Noone was a British officer working with the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) as a planning officer. He had developed contacts among local aboriginal people after searching years earlier for information about the fate of his late brother Pat. Noone was brought into the investigation as a more credible source to help with the search. He walked into the jungle and, after speaking with aboriginal people, emerged 36 hours later. He said that he was convinced Thompson was not in the jungle.

As time marched on without any trace of Thompson, the theories about his disappearance grew from the mundane to the outlandish. It was initially believed that he had been the victim of an accident or was lost in the jungle. Then people began to suggest that he had been kidnapped for ransom. Another theory suggested that a tiger had eaten him, but no remains were ever found.

Then came conspiracy theorists, who suggested that the former intelligence officer had been kidnapped as part of a political plot, perhaps by

Communist guerillas. However, no one ever stepped forward to claim what was considered to be a sizeable reward at the time. In 1974, Thompson was officially declared dead. All that remains of the man who revived Thailand's silk industry in the 1950s is his Bangkok home that lives on as a museum.

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# WANTED

SAN FRANCISCO POLICE DEPARTMENT

NO. 90-69

WANTED FOR MURDER

OCTOBER 18, 1969



ORIGINAL DRAWING



AMENDED DRAWING

Supplementing our Bulletin 87-69 of October 13, 1969. Additional information has developed the above amended drawing of murder suspect known as "ZODIAC".

WMA, 35-45 Years, approximately 5'8", Heavy Build, Short Brown Hair, possibly with Red Tint, Wears Glasses. Armed with 9 MM Automatic.

Available for comparison: Slugs, Casings, Latents, Handwriting.

ANY INFORMATION:  
Inspectors Armstrong & Toschi  
Homicide Detail  
CASE NO. 696314

THOMAS J. CAHILL  
CHIEF OF POLICE

San Francisco police circulated this composite of the Bay Area's "Zodiac" killer on October 21, 1969. Bettmann/Corbis.

## Cryptic Killer: The Case of the Zodiac Killer (1968-1969)

*The Zodiac Killer used the media to draw attention to his serial murders and send fear far beyond the geographic area in which he committed his crimes. Thirty years later, forensic techniques had evolved to the extent that a crime lab was able to extract the Zodiac Killer's DNA from a stamp that he had licked on the envelope of a letter he sent a newspaper. It has not led police to the killer, but they now have DNA with which to compare a potential suspect in the unlikely event that one should be identified more than 40 years later.*

Five days before Christmas in 1968, 17-year-old David Faraday picked up 16-year-old Betty Lou Jensen for their first date. They were going to a high school Christmas concert in Vallejo, a town just northeast of San Francisco. Afterwards they drove out to Lake Herman Road and pulled up next to the reservoir's pump house in the Vallejo hills overlooking San Francisco.

At about 11:15 PM, the couple was startled by a thin beam of light shining through the window of the car's driver's side. As Faraday reached over to open the door to step out of the vehicle, he was shot in the head while still behind the wheel of his car. His body slumped across the front seat. Jensen scrambled out of the car and managed to run 30 feet before being shot five times in the back. Then the killer fled. The teenagers had been killed with a .22-caliber semi-automatic pistol.

A woman who was driving by the area about 10 minutes later saw Jensen's body sprawled on the ground. She hit the gas to go get help and flagged down a passing police car. By the time that officers arrived at the scene, Jensen was dead. Faraday was unconscious but died soon after being rushed to the hospital. There were no witnesses to the shooting and the police could not find a motive. No sexual assault or robbery had occurred, and investigators found no connection with a jilted or jealous lover. The mysterious double murder remained unsolved.

Seven months later, Michael Mageau, 19, and his friend waitress Darlene Ferrin, 22, went out for the evening. At about midnight she parked her Ford Corvair at the Blue Rock Springs Park just two miles from the pre-Christmas killing of Jensen and Faraday. As the couple sat there, a white car pulled up beside them for few minutes and then drove away. It returned and parked on the other side of the road. The driver climbed out and shone a bright light into their eyes. Mageau thought that it was a policeman—until the man quickly opened fire

with a 9mm pistol. Ferrin slumped down in her seat after four bullets ripped through her chest. Seconds later, Mageau was hit—shot in one leg, the right elbow, and shoulder. The final bullet tore into his neck and ripped his tongue. The shooter then walked back to his car and fired another four or five times before speeding away. Ferrin, who was the mother of an 18-month-old daughter, died. The critically wounded Mageau lay sprawled just outside the car.

Less than an hour later, a man called the Vallejo Police Department. “I want to report a double murder,” he told the dispatcher. “Go one mile east on Columbus Parkway to the public park. You will find kids in a brown car. They were shot with a 9mm Luger. I also killed those kids last year,” he said referring to Faraday and Jensen.

## SERIAL KILLER

When the police arrived, Ferrin was dead but Mageau was still alive. He later described the suspect as being a stocky, round-faced man, about five feet eight inches, with light brown wavy or curly hair. Police learned that it matched the description of a man who had been seen parked outside Ferrin’s apartment four months earlier. When Ferrin’s babysitter had asked her about it at the time, she explained that the man was checking up on her because she saw him murder someone. Police now knew that the murder was possibly connected to the double slaying before Christmas, but that’s where the clues stopped.

Less than a month after Ferrin’s slaying, letters arrived on August 1, 1969, at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, and the *Vallejo Times-Herald*. The writer took responsibility for the slayings and provided details that only the killer was likely to know. “Dear Editor,” the letter began. “I am the killer of the 2 teen-agers last Christmas at Lake Herman and the girl last 4th of July. To prove this I shall state some facts which I only and the police know. Christmas \*Brand name of ammo Super X; 10 shots fired; Boy was on back feet to car; girl was lyeing (sic) on right side feet to west; 4th of July 1. Girl was wearing patterned pants; boy was also shot in knee; brand name of ammo was Western.”

He signed his letters with a distinctive cross inside a circle—the symbol for zodiac—like the crosshairs of a telescope. Each letter included a third of a cipher; the strange symbols were arranged in eight lines of 17 characters each. Taken together, the ciphers in the three



letters comprised one complete message. The killer demanded that the newspapers print the letter and cipher on their front page or he would go on a weekend rampage and kill more people. "I will cruise around and pick off all stray people or couples that are one, then move on to kill even more until I have killed over a dozen people." The letters and ciphers were printed.

The letter writer also said that the cipher would lead to his identity—if police could crack the code. But they could not. The messages baffled investigators. Cryptographers at the Mare Island Naval Yard tried to crack it but were unsuccessful. Salinas High School history and economics teacher Donald Harden and his wife finally broke the code after 10 hours of intense work. They had done it by looking for groups of signs that could spell the word "kill" because it was likely to be repeated throughout the message. "I like killing people because it is so much fun it is more fun than killing wild game in the forrest (sic) because man is the most dangeroue (sic) anamal (sic) of all to kill something gives me the most thrilling expeerence. . . . The best part of it is thae when I die I will be reborn in paradice and all the I have killed will become my slaves. I will not give you my name because you will tra to sloi down or stop my collecting of slaves for my afterlife. . . ." Compounding the challenge of deciphering the code were the message's spelling and syntax errors. Another letter was mailed on August 7, providing more details of the latest murder and leaving police no doubt that the author was the killer.

Nothing more was heard until September 27, 1969. Cecilia Ann Shepard, 22, and Brian Hartnell, 20, were friends and fellow students at Pacific Union College in Angwin, California. They went for a picnic on the shores of Lake Berryessa about 13 miles north of Vallejo and about 60 miles northeast of San Francisco. They were lying on a blanket at about 6:30 PM staring up at the beautiful blue sky on that sunny day. A stocky man with brown hair came across the clearing and then disappeared into some bushes. He emerged a few minutes later wearing a hood and carrying a gun. "I want your money and your car keys," he said. Hartnell replied that he only had 76 cents, but offered to give it to the man. The gunman said that he was going to have to tie them up. He pulled out a coil of clothesline and had Shepard tie up Hartnell. Then he tied up the young woman himself.

At first, he said that he did not intend to hurt them. Minutes later, however, he abruptly said, "I'm going to have to stab you people." Hartnell begged to be stabbed first. "I'm chicken. I couldn't bear to

see her stabbed,” he told the assailant referring to Shepard. The man agreed. “I’ll do just that,” he said. He pulled a knife from his belt and dropped to his knees. He stabbed Hartnell about a dozen times and then he turned his attention to Shepard. She twisted and turned to try to avoid the hunting knife, but was attacked 24 times. She was stabbed in each breast, the stomach, and the groin in the pattern of a cross.

When the assailant had finished, he walked over to Hartnell’s car and paused. He used a felt-tip pen to draw a crossed-circle symbol on the door of the Volkswagen and wrote:

Vallejo

12-20-68

7-4-69

September 27-29-6:30

By knife

A fisherman who was on the lake heard Shepard and Hartnell’s screams as they were being stabbed, and then he saw their bodies lying on the shore. They were about two miles from the park ranger’s station. He raced to the park’s headquarters and returned half an hour later with rangers William White and Dennis Land. Hartnell had managed to loosen the piece of clothesline with which he was bound and crawled 225 yards to the edge of the highway. Shepard was writhing around on the ground in agony and barely had a pulse. The rangers wrapped them in blankets and waited for an ambulance to arrive.

By the time they were rushed to hospital, the Napa Police Department had received an anonymous call from a payphone. “I want to report a murder,” the man said. “No, a double murder. They are two miles north of park headquarters. They were in a white Volkswagen Karmann Ghia. I’m the one that did it.” Shepard died in Queen of the Valley Hospital two days later. Hartnell recovered, but by then police knew that they were dealing with the Zodiac Killer. He had left his calling card on the passenger door of Hartnell’s vehicle.

Officers located the telephone booth from which the anonymous call had originated in front of a carwash. It was six blocks from the Napa Valley Police Department’s headquarters. The phone had been left dangling off the hook. Investigators found several fingerprints, but none matched any that police had on file. They also discovered a size 11 footprint at the crime scene, and an unusual pattern made by the sole of a type of shoe that was sold at Sears.

## MEDIA PUBLICITY

By then, media publicity in northern California surrounding the Zodiac Killer was growing. Police began receiving 100 calls each day from people claiming to know who the killer was—but none led to significant clues that could help solve the murders. It was his next crime that turned the Zodiac Killer into a major news story around the world.

On the evening of October 11, 1969, Yellow Cab driver Paul Stine, 29, picked up a fare near Union Square on Nob Hill in San Francisco and drove to Presidio Heights. As Stine sat behind the wheel of his car at the intersection of Washington and Cherry Streets, his passenger put a pistol to the cabbie's head and pulled the trigger. Stine slumped over, dead. The gunman climbed out of the back seat. Once he was on the sidewalk, he leaned through the open window of the cab's front seat, ripped a piece of Stine's shirt, and wiped the cab with a piece of cloth to erase his fingerprints. He straightened up and fled on foot toward the Presidio. According to witnesses, he was stocky with horn rimmed glasses and brown hair.

Police arrived on the scene and discovered that Stine's wallet and the cash that he had earned from his previous fares were missing. That led them to believe that robbery was the motive for the killing. They swarmed the neighborhood in force, looking for the suspect, but a dispatcher had mistakenly broadcast that the suspect was an African American. Two police officers stopped a stocky Caucasian man on a nearby street to ask him if he had seen someone who resembled the alleged killer. The man, who police later realized may have been the Zodiac Killer, replied that he had not. Police let him go. Officers flooded the Presidio with lights after a stocky man was seen running into the area. They searched with patrolmen and seven police dogs, but Stine's killer was gone.

Three days later, police learned that the Zodiac Killer was behind the slaying. He sent a letter to the *San Francisco Chronicle* claiming responsibility and chiding police for not finding him when they searched Julius Kahn Park and a nearby wooded portion of the Presidio. He had placed a bloody piece of Stine's shirt inside the envelope as proof that he was the killer. He also claimed to have attacked seven victims, instead of the five of which the police were aware.

Investigators discovered that Stine had been killed with the same .22-caliber gun as Jensen and Faraday less than 10 months earlier. Thanks to witnesses who saw Stine's killer flee the scene of the crime, they now had enough information for a police artist to put together

a sketch of the suspect's appearance. The composite, which was plastered around San Francisco, showed a heavily built white male with short brown hair and glasses who was about 5 feet 8 inches tall.

In his letter to the newspaper, the Zodiac Killer threatened to shoot up a school bus. "School children make nice targets," he wrote. "I think I shall wipe out a school bus some morning. Just shoot out the tires and then pick off all the kiddies as they come bouncing out." The threat was not taken lightly. It created widespread panic, and for weeks armed officers rode on school buses in Napa County. Police cars in Sausalito escorted buses to and from schools. Elsewhere in California, buses traveled to and from schools as they did on any other day but drivers had been drilled on the appropriate procedures to follow if the Zodiac Killer attempted to fulfill his threat. The threat was never carried out, but communication from a man who said that he was responsible for the serial murders continued.

On October 21, 1969, a man claiming to be the Zodiac Killer phoned the Oakland police department and said that he wanted to give himself up. He would only do it if he was represented by a renowned criminal lawyer such as F. Lee Bailey or Melvin Belli. He also wanted to speak to the host of a popular and well-known breakfast television talk show while it was on the air. Police thought that the request was unusual, but they were willing to play along.

Belli and host Jim Dunbar agreed to be on the air at 6:45 AM to receive the call. At 7:45 AM, a soft boyish voice came on the line. He said that he was the Zodiac Killer but he preferred to be called Sam. Hartnell and two police switchboard operators were the only ones who had heard the Zodiac Killer's voice to date. They had been brought into the television studio to help verify the authenticity of the call. After hearing the voice, they shook their heads and said that it was not the Zodiac Killer. The call appeared to be a hoax.

Five days before Christmas in 1969, Belli received a Christmas card that included another piece of Stine's bloodstained shirt. The Zodiac Killer wrote a letter appealing to the prominent lawyer for help. "Dear Melvin," he began. "This is the Zodiac speaking. I wish you a happy Christmas. The one thing I ask of you is this. Please help me. . . . I am afraid I will lose control and take my ninth and possible tenth victim." The police were only aware of five confirmed murders. Was he inflating his number by including the death of a young college student and the two young men whom he had injured? Were there more killings that had not yet been linked to the Zodiac? Police didn't know.

## MORE VICTIMS?

Three months later, 22-year-old Kathleen Johns was driving with her infant daughter near Modesto, California, on the evening of March 22, 1970. Another motorist in a white Chevrolet flashed his headlights and honked his horn to attract her attention. Johns pulled over. The clean shaven and neatly dressed man told her that one of the rear tires on her car seemed dangerously loose. He pulled out a lug wrench to tighten it and spent a few minutes attempting to fix it. When she began to drive away, however, the wheel fell off.

The man offered to give Johns a lift to the nearest garage. He then drove past it and took her for a ride through the countryside for several hours. He threatened to kill her and her child. She finally managed to escape from the car when he slowed down on the curve of a freeway ramp. Johns jumped out with her baby in her arms and hid in a roadside irrigation ditch. The driver pulled over and started looking for her with a flashlight that he had taken from the trunk of his car. He ran off when he was caught in the headlights of an oncoming truck.

Johns made her way to a local police station to report the abduction. While she was there, she looked up and noticed the wanted poster showing sketches of the Zodiac Killer. She told police that man was her attacker. When they drove her back to her car, it had been completely burned.

In July 1970, the *San Francisco Chronicle* received a letter from the Zodiac Killer in which he made an unsubstantiated claim of having murdered 13 people. In October, he sent a Halloween card to the newspaper's crime reporter Paul Avery, threatening to kill him. "You are doomed," he warned. In a show of solidarity with their colleague, nearly everyone on the *Chronicle* staff, including Avery, began wearing campaign-style buttons that said, "I Am Not Paul Avery."

Resulting media publicity of the threat prompted a tip that the 1966 unsolved murder of Cheri Jo Bates was similar to the Zodiac's confirmed killings. One evening at the end of October 1966, 18-year-old freshman Bates left the campus library at Riverside City College about 60 miles east of Los Angeles. After walking to her car, she discovered that someone had disconnected her vehicle's distributor coil, which disabled the car. According to the police's theory, the killer approached her to offer help. Then he dragged her behind some bushes and she struggled furiously for her life.

Bates was stabbed in the chest and back, her throat slashed so deeply that she was almost decapitated. A letter sent to the local press in

November 1966 said that her murder was not the killer's first and that she would not be his last. But the police had no leads. After an article about the case was published on April 30, 1967, identically worded letters were sent to newspapers, the police, and the victim's father. It read, "Bates had to die. There will be more." A state documents expert compared the Zodiac Killer's handwriting with the letters written to Riverside authorities and Bates's father. They appeared to match. If this was the work of the Zodiac Killer, why had he waited two years to kill again, the police wondered?

Nine more letters were received from the Zodiac between April 1970 and March 1971, but his killing spree appeared to have stopped. Including Bates, he had taken six lives and seriously wounded two others. Nothing more was heard for nearly three years, until the *San Francisco Chronicle* received on January 30, 1974, the first authentic Zodiac letter to be sent in several years. In it, he claimed more victims, 37 in total. He signed his letter with the notation, Me-37/SFPD-0. Then he dropped out of sight again.

In April 1978, the Zodiac Killer broke a four-year silence. "This is Zodiac speaking," read the hand-printed letter written in the Zodiac's trademark blue felt-tipped pen to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "I am back with you." In it, he mocked Inspector David Toschi of the San Francisco Police Department's Homicide Squad for his failure to crack the case. The detective had been on the case for nine years.

The police believed that the letter was from the same man who had murdered six people and wounded two others in the San Francisco Bay area. Toschi was later removed from the case on suspicion that he had written the letter himself. There were no further killings, and experts were divided as to whether the letter came from the same man as the previous ones.

## POSSIBLE SUSPECTS

Over the years, police in the four jurisdictions where the Zodiac killings had occurred, along with investigators for the state and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, questioned and checked out an estimated 2,500 suspects. One of the most prominent was Arthur Leigh Allen. The Vallejo police department began investigating him as a possible suspect in 1971 after an acquaintance in his trailer park said that the retired teacher and former mental patient had fantasized about committing a series of murders. According to the source, he had talked about

killing lovers in a lover's lane and murdering a cabbie. Allen denied that he was the Zodiac or that he had killed anyone.

A July 29, 1971, report by California's department of justice was sent to the Vallejo police informing them that Allen's handwriting did not match that of the Zodiac Killer. Police found nothing incriminating during a search of Allen's home on September 14, 1972, nor were his fingerprints a match. Soon afterward, Allen was cleared after passing a 10-hour polygraph test, but suspicions never quite evaporated.

Police made another attempt to solve the serial murders. They raided Allen's home in Vallejo in 1991. The items that they seized included a box of handwritten letters that spanned 25 years, handguns, some explosives, and his Zodiac brand watch. Allen died a year later, in 1992, at the age of 58. He was never charged in connection with the Zodiac Killer murders. A handwriting expert could find no link between Allen and the Zodiac. Police speculated that perhaps Allen had committed the murders and an accomplice wrote the letters.

Thirty years after the Zodiac Killer murdered his last known victim, forensic technology had advanced significantly. As San Francisco Police Department investigator Kelly Carroll pointed out to a reporter, DNA analysis "was science fiction back in 1969." But by 2002, it was a reality.

The San Francisco Police Department was able to extract a partial DNA profile from a fingerprint that had been found on envelopes that once contained the Zodiac's letters. Dr. Cydne Holt, supervisor of the San Francisco Police Department's DNA lab, also recovered DNA samples from the saliva beneath a stamp on a Zodiac card mailed November 8, 1969. It was tested against brain tissue from Allen's 1992 autopsy, but it was not a match. He was not the man who had licked the stamp on the letter. After four decades, the hope of closing the case becomes dimmer and dimmer. The San Francisco Police Department has put the investigation on hold and locked away 30 years of evidence to focus its efforts and limited resources on more recent cases.

The man who captured headlines in the late 1960s and has not yet been caught still remains in the public's imagination. The Zodiac sent 21 letters about his crimes to newspapers in the San Francisco Bay area. He signed each one with a cross inside a circle, and his cryptograms baffled police. Books and Web sites offer theories about the possible identity of the killer. In 2007, movie director David Fincher released the film *Zodiac*. It starred Mark Ruffalo as San Francisco Police Department homicide inspector Dave Toschi, Robert Downey Jr.

as crime reporter Paul Avery, and Jake Gyllenhaal as *Chronicle* editorial cartoonist Robert Graysmith who wrote two bestselling books about this unsolved mystery.

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A passenger known as “Dan Cooper” and “D. B. Cooper” hijacked a Northwest Orient Airlines jet on November 24, 1971, and then parachuted from the plane with \$200,000 in ransom money. He has never been found. AP Photo/FBI.

# The Vanishing Hijacker: The Disappearance of D. B. Cooper (1971)

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*A man who became known as D. B. Cooper was the first person to hijack an airplane in the United States strictly for money. Then he jumped out of an airplane and disappeared. This incident prompted a number of changes to air travel security in the United States, including the addition of a latch to prevent an airplane's rear stairs from deploying during flight, peepholes in cockpit doors, and the mandatory screening of passengers and carry-on luggage.*

It was the day before Thanksgiving on November 24, 1971, when a well-dressed man in his mid-forties walked up to the Northwest Orient Airlines counter in Portland, Oregon, just before 2 PM. He was wearing a dark raincoat, dark suit with a skinny black J. C. Penney tie, and a white shirt, and he was carrying an attaché case. He wanted to buy a one-way coach-class ticket to Seattle, Washington. He handed the agent a \$20 bill and said that his name was Dan Cooper.

Cooper boarded flight 305 with 35 other passengers and sat in seat 18-C. He had that last row of the airplane to himself. There were three flight attendants, two pilots, and a flight engineer for the 25-minute trip aboard the Boeing 72-100. He ordered a bourbon and soda and lit up Raleigh filter tip cigarettes. He was a quiet man. "He seemed rather nice," flight attendant Tina Mucklow later said. "He was never cruel or nasty. He was thoughtful and calm."

At about 3:22 PM, soon after takeoff, Cooper donned a pair of wrap-around sunglasses and handed a flight attendant a note. Thinking that he was hitting on her for a date, Mucklow placed the note in her pocket. He motioned for her to read it. "Miss, I have a bomb," it said. She followed his order to take a seat beside him. To demonstrate that he was serious, he opened his briefcase and showed Mucklow two red cylinders and a tangle of wires.

## HIJACKING

The flight attendant wrote down Cooper's instructions to give the pilot. The hijacker would blow up the Boeing 727 unless he received \$200,000 in \$20 bills placed in a laundry sack and four parachutes when the plane landed in Seattle. Mucklow brought the note to the pilot, Captain William W. Scott and First Officer William Rataczak. It was the first time that a plane was being hijacked strictly for money. Previous hijackers had done it for political reasons.

Captain Scott radioed the hijacker's demands to Seattle-Tacoma Airport's air traffic control tower before they reached their destination that day. The amount being requested was so large that airline workers had to go to several banks to collect the money. Two types of parachutes were found at McChord Air Force Base in Tacoma and rushed to Seattle.

When Cooper found out that he was being given military models, he demanded skydiving sport models instead. Military models open automatically after about 200 feet, whereas with sports chutes divers can freefall as long as they want before pulling the ripcord. Seattle police tried to find a skydiving school that was open just before the Thanksgiving holiday. They tracked down Earl Cossey, who was enjoying a day off. He packed the four parachutes and handed them to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Agents thought the hijacker might be requesting extra parachutes because he planned to have some of the crew jump with him.

At 4:50 PM ground control told the pilots, "FBI and police have advised no action to be taken. We are awaiting his concurrence that you should land." But it was taking time to gather the money and parachutes. While everything was being prepared to meet Cooper's demands, the plane circled over the Seattle airport. Passengers were unaware of the hijacking. They were told that the plane was having mechanical trouble and it was trying to burn up fuel before landing. "He was quite relaxed, sitting in the back seat on the starboard [right] side," passenger Robert B. Gregory later told a reporter. Another passenger, William Mitchell of Redmond, Washington, was sitting across the aisle from Cooper and had no idea what he was up to.

The plane landed just before 6 PM, but passengers were kept on the plane until the money and parachutes were ready. "Impress on this man that we are not trying to stall," the tower radioed. "The money is on its way. It was picked up at more than one bank." Northwest was assembling enough money to pay the ransom—the biggest ever paid in a U.S. hijacking at the time. Captain Scott was careful not to alarm the hijacker. "We'll ask you to stay there until we can coordinate with our friend in the back [the hijacker]," he told the crews on the ground when the plane landed in Seattle. An official of the Federal Aviation Administration boarded the plane at one point and tried to talk the hijacker into surrendering. "Let's get this show on the road," Cooper had replied.

Once the ransom money—all 21 pounds of it—and parachutes were placed aboard the plane, Cooper let the other passengers leave.

Negotiations continued about the three flight attendants on board. At 6:50 Scott told Northwest Control that two of the flight attendants had been allowed to leave. One flight attendant remained with Cooper. "He's getting awfully antsy. He wants the stewardess sitting back there with him on the take-off."

Cooper wanted Scott and Rataczak to take the plane to Mexico. The crew explained that it was out of the plane's maximum range. He agreed to a refueling stop in Reno and wanted the plane to fly low and slow. He ordered the two pilots to fly at an altitude of under 10,000 feet, with the wing flaps at 15 degrees, the landing gear down, and the rear stairway door unlocked. This would slow the plane down enough to make jumping easier; at this rate it would not be able to fly faster than about 200 miles per hour. The plane, which the airline had purchased in 1965, was easy to manoeuvre. It had the ability to take off at low speeds and land at small airports. It was also the only commercial jet to be equipped with stairs in the rear of the plane and from which it was safe to parachute because the rear exit is behind and under the engines.

After the plane left Seattle, Cooper sent the flight attendant to the cockpit, where she was to stay with the rest of the crew. As Mucklow glanced back on her way to the cockpit, she thought that she saw Cooper using a cord to tie something, probably the 21-pound bag of money, around his waist. He remained in the cabin by himself and communicated with Captain Scott over the intercom.

At 7:42 PM, five minutes after the plane had left Seattle a red light came on in the cockpit indicating that the rear stairway door had been opened. The crew heard nothing from the hijacker for about 20 minutes. At 8:10 PM the plane crossed the Lewis River in southwestern Washington State, near the village of Ariel, southwest of Woodland. The plane was flying at 7,000 feet and about 200 miles an hour. Scott thought that the hijacker was having trouble with the ramp. "Anything we can do for you?" he asked over the plane's intercom. There was no answer. Another light flashed showing that the rear stairs were fully extended. A few seconds later, Cooper replied "no," in response to Scott's question. It was the last that anyone heard from him.

## PARACHUTE

Cooper strapped on one parachute to his chest and the other to his back. Then he climbed down the rear stairs of the airplane. A cover of cloud hovering at 5,000 feet obscured the rugged wooded terrain

below. When the plane landed in Reno, Nevada, the rear ramp was down. There was no sign of Cooper, the 21-pound sack of money, two parachutes, and the explosive device. The hijacker had leapt from the plane somewhere over southwestern Washington and into a thunderstorm with 200-mile-per-hour winds, freezing rain, and a temperature of minus-7 degrees Fahrenheit. He was wearing little more than a business suit and street shoes. As FBI agent Ralph Himmelsbach pointed out to reporters, “He didn’t ask for a helmet, gloves, flight jacket, jumpsuit, or boots. It was seven below zero outside, it was dark, and the plane was going 196 miles per hour. And he was wearing slip-on loafers.”

Two Air Force jet fighters and a C-130 cargo plane had trailed the 727 from Seattle, but they didn’t see anyone parachute from the plane. The military planes could not fly sufficiently slowly or low enough to keep the 727 in view. An Air Force spokesman told a reporter that Cooper would not have been seen under the cover of darkness if he went into freefall for 1,000 feet before opening his chute. Himmelsbach headed the Cooper investigation until he retired on March 1, 1980. He had been a P-40 fighter pilot in World War II, and he tried to intercept the airliner in a helicopter flown by an army pilot. “But we couldn’t follow them. The visibility was terrible and we were too slow.”

In the ensuing media coverage, a reporter mistakenly identified the hijacker as “D. B. Cooper”—a moniker that stuck. Dan Cooper, the name that the man gave the Northwest Orient Airlines agent at the ticket counter, was an alias. The FBI interviewed a Portland man with that name the day after the hijacking and cleared him of any involvement. Two flight attendants described the unknown hijacker as being five-feet, 10-inches to six-feet tall, 170 to 180 pounds, in his mid-40s, with brown eyes and short dark hair. He had an “olive, Latin appearance,” a wide forehead, and a receding hair. He had a low voice with no discernible accent and chain-smoked Raleigh filter-tip cigarettes.

The FBI learned of the hijacking while the flight was airborne and immediately launched an investigation that is still open nearly 40 years later. They called it NORJAK, for Northwest hijacking. After the plane had landed minus Cooper, agents boarded the aircraft and scoured it for evidence. Cooper left nothing behind but his skinny black tie, a tie tack, eight of his cigarette butts, and the two parachutes. He had reclaimed the note that he had given Mucklow, leaving no fingerprints as evidence. Investigators believed they were looking for an experienced

skydiver or paratrooper. Northwest offered a \$25,000 reward for recovery of the ransom.

## SEARCH FOR COOPER

Searchers did not know precisely where Cooper had landed, but the FBI had an idea of the most likely spot. It concentrated on a wilderness area 25 miles northeast of Portland, Oregon, starting around Amboy, Washington, just south of Lake Merwin. The area south of the Lewis River in the Cascade foothills is covered with fir. Thirty deputies from Clark and Cowlitz counties and half a dozen FBI agents searched the woods and farmland near Woodland, Washington. “We’re either looking for a parachute or a hole in the ground,” Under Sheriff Tom McDowell of Clark County said at the time.

Soldiers from Fort Lewis also participated. Planes, helicopters, jeeps, and dogs were used in the search. The men combed a densely wooded region northeast of Woodland. It was rugged terrain and had freshly fallen snow that made the area nearly impassable. Low clouds and fog hampered the efforts of FBI agents, sheriff’s deputies, and the helicopter and ground crews. The army withdrew its helicopters because of poor visibility, but lumber company Weyerhaeuser and the Bonneville Power Administration made intermittent passes over the area.

The search was disbanded a week later. Having found no traces of Cooper or the money, searchers believed that he died when he jumped from the plane. In late March 1972, they resumed the search with 300 soldiers from Fort Lewis. They hoped the thawing ground would reveal a body, a parachute, or cash. After having found no trace of Cooper or his loot 18 days later, the search was called off. He had committed the first successful hijacking of an American airliner. Without mandatory security screening to examine carry-on bags, there were an alarming 147 hijackings between 1967 and 1972.

On December 8, 1971, U.S. Attorney General John N. Mitchell released the serial numbers of the \$20 bills that comprised Cooper’s ransom. Some newspapers published the list, hoping that the money—and the audacious hijacker—would turn up. But no bills were recovered. With few other clues available, the FBI drew up a profile of the hijacker. Cooper knew how to skydive in difficult conditions, which led agents to believe that he had been in the army or was a paratrooper. He was also sufficiently familiar with planes to give the pilots precise instructions

about the altitude at which to fly and the angle of the wing flaps he needed to make his jump.

Although the hijacker had left no clues to his true identity, the legend of D. B. Cooper had already begun. “You know, it’s funny,” said one local resident at the time. “Folks are actually *pulling* for this man. That’s all anybody wants to talk about. I hear it all day long. ‘Hope he made it, he deserves it, hope he gets away with every nickel.’ Like he’s some kind of Robin Hood character.” Cooper’s high-profile sky-jacking would inspire similar incidents over the following five months. In January 1972, a young man was given two parachutes and \$50,000 after saying that he had a bomb. He bailed over Colorado but was later found half a mile from where his parachute was located. In April, a man aboard a Pacific Southwest Airlines jet flying from Oakland to San Diego demanded \$500,000 and parachutes. San Diego police captured him an hour after the plane landed. The following month an Eastern Airlines flight was hijacked shortly after taking off from Allentown, Pennsylvania, bound for Miami. The 48 passengers were released in Washington, D.C., in exchange for \$303,000. The crew’s 21-hour ordeal ended an hour after the hijacker—who was described as a Vietnam War veteran—parachuted from the Boeing 727 into Central America before dawn. Also in May 1972, an armed youth commandeered a Western Airlines plane traveling from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles and forced it to fly to Cuba.

One of the most widely publicized hijackings after Cooper’s occurred on April 7, 1972. Twenty-nine-year-old Richard Floyd McCoy Jr. was accused of hijacking a United Airlines 727 jet flying from Newark to Los Angeles just after it made a scheduled stop in Denver. He showed flight attendant Diane Surdam a hand grenade with the pin pulled, and handed her an envelope while the plane was 40 miles west of Grand Junction, Colorado. He said that the envelope contained a bullet, a hand grenade pin, a flight plan to San Francisco, and a note reading “Grenade, pin pulled, pistol.” He demanded \$500,000 and parachutes. The plane was diverted to San Francisco, where money and parachutes were exchanged for the passengers. The flight continued onwards and McCoy bailed over Provo, Utah.

McCoy had asked for all of his notes to be returned to him before he jumped, but Surdam kept one. A highway patrolman told police that he had heard McCoy talk about how he was going to hijack a plane and demand \$500,000. They matched the handwriting on the hijacker’s



note to McCoy's military record on file in Washington, D.C. He was a law enforcement student at Brigham Young University, a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, active in the Mormon Church, and a skydiving enthusiast.

## POSSIBLE SUSPECTS

When the FBI arrested McCoy, he had \$499,970 in a cardboard box. They thought that he was D. B. Cooper and connected him to the November 1971 hijacking. He was ruled out, however, because he didn't match the almost identical physical descriptions that flight attendants gave of Cooper. He had an alibi for the time of the Cooper hijacking and also ate Thanksgiving dinner with his family in Utah the afternoon following the Cooper hijacking. It seemed unlikely that he was the man who had jumped into a terrible storm hours earlier. The crime of hijacking carried a penalty of 20 years to life in prison. McCoy was sentenced to 45 years behind bars. He subsequently escaped using a fake gun made from plaster of Paris and died in 1974 during a shootout with the FBI when they attempted to recapture him.

In the first year following the hijacking, a letter addressed to the *New York Times* was sent from the 902 area code that includes San Diego and part of Orange County. It claimed to be from Cooper's brother, and said that the hijacker had died September 12, 1972, after an illness. The FBI searched death records for someone whose background included a death after a lengthy illness, but they turned up no leads.

A man who claimed to be D. B. Cooper bilked the editor of a Los Angeles weekly newspaper out of \$30,000. He had shown the journalist a photocopy of \$20 bills with the same serial numbers as Cooper's ransom money, but the FBI said that the photocopies had been altered. They arrested the man posing as Cooper and an intermediary in May 1972. The accused were William John Lewis, also known as Seth Murphy, and Donald Sylvester Murphy who pretended to be D. B. Cooper.

Despite the setbacks, the FBI doggedly pursued their investigation. In 1979, a hunter in Washington State found a heavy plastic placard that was an emergency warning notice of the type posted next to the rear exit of 727s. The notice, which was found in a wooded area, had been missing from Cooper's 727 after he jumped. "There isn't any way that it could have come off a plane without the door being

opened,” Cowlitz County sheriff Les Nelson said at the time. “It’s inconceivable, it’s one in a million, that any other plane could have lost it in the area in which D. B. Cooper jumped.” The placard was found “six flying minutes” from where he was believed to have jumped.

On February 10, 1980, Harold Dwayne Ingram and his eight-year-old son, Brian, were on a family picnic on the north bank of the Columbia River near Vancouver, Washington. Ingram, an aircraft assembly plant painter, had an armload of wood and was about to build a fire. His son pushed away some sand. Three bundles of money came into view. Brian had found a package of \$5,880 in decomposing \$20 bills, damaged by prolonged exposure to water. Almost all of the money had crumbled around the edges and some had shrunk to about the size of a business card. The bills were found in 12 bundles each of which was bound with a rubber band. The serial numbers matched 294 of the bills that Cooper had been given. It was the only Cooper money ever to be recovered, and it was believed to have washed down from one of the Columbia River’s tributaries.

The FBI cordoned off the area to search for more money and possibly the hijacker’s remains. “Our intent is to dig up this beach and see if we can find any more bundles of money, or a suitcase maybe that he carried it in,” said a law enforcement official during the manhunt. FBI agents combed the beach but were unable to find the other 9,706 bills. In 1986, Ingram and the insurance company for Northwest Orient each received \$2,760 of the money that Ingram found. The FBI kept 14 of the \$20 bills in case Cooper is ever found and prosecuted.

Over the years, a number of people have found parachutes that they believed Cooper had once used. In November 1979, a logger found one near Kelso in southwestern Washington State. Nine years later a diver searching the Columbia River for clues about Cooper’s fate found a piece of parachute a few hundred yards from where Ingram had found the ransom money in 1980. Lawyer and former FBI agent Richard Tosaw had funded that expedition because he wanted to see if he could find the remains of the hijacker or his money.

In 2008, children were playing outside their home near Amboy, Washington, when they unearthed a torn and tattered silk parachute on a dirt road. But Cossey, who had packed Cooper’s parachutes, examined them and found that none proved to be the nylon ones used by the elusive hijacker. “They keep bringing me garbage,” he told a reporter. “Every time they find squat, they bring it out and open their

trunk and say, 'Is that it?' and I say, 'Nope, go away.' Then a few years later they come back."

In March 1995, Florida antique dealer Duane Weber lay dying of kidney disease in a Pensacola hospital when he told his wife Jo that he was Dan Cooper. His wife had no idea what he meant. The couple was married for 17 years, after meeting in Atlanta six years after the hijacking. Weber rarely spoke of his past, but he had told his wife that he had served in the military and done time in prison for burglary. Just before he died, Weber also told Jo that he had sustained an old knee injury from jumping out of a plane.

A book that Jo Weber checked out of the library in May 1996 said that D. B. Cooper was in his mid-40s, 6 feet tall, weighed 170 pounds, had black hair, was a bourbon drinker, and a chain smoker. At the time of the hijacking, Duane Weber was 47 years old, 6 feet, 1 inch tall, and weighed around 185 pounds. He had black hair, drank bourbon, and chain-smoked. The similarities between a younger Weber and the FBI's composite drawings struck Jo, and the FBI began investigating a possible connection in March 1997. Weber served in the Army in the early 1940s and did time in at least six prisons from 1945 to 1968 for burglary and forgery. One prison was McNeil Island in Steilacoom, Washington, 20 miles from the Seattle-Tacoma Airport.

There were also a number of coincidences. Weber was sleep talking in May 1978 when he said that he left his fingerprints on the "aft stairs." Then he woke up in a sweat. During a trip the following year, the Webers stopped west of Interstate 5 across the Columbia River from Portland. Weber walked down to the river by himself. Four months later, Brian Ingram found tattered money from the Cooper ransom in the area. Jo Weber was reviewing tax records in January 1994 when she came across an old plane ticket that said SEA-TAC and Northwest Airlines. She was unable to find it again after her husband died. As he lay dying in hospital in March 1995, Weber said that he forgot where he buried \$173,000 in a bucket.

The FBI interviewed Jo Weber, one of Duane's former wives, and his brother. They compared his fingerprints with the 66 unaccounted-for prints on Flight 305. None matched, although the FBI had no way to know if any of the prints were Cooper's since other people had likely left behind fingerprints. In 2001, they lifted a DNA sample from the skinny tie that Cooper left behind on the plane. On March 28, 2003, two agents took an electric razor, a pair of slippers, gloves, and other items that once belonged to Weber. They compared Duane Weber's

DNA to that left by the skyjacker on the tie and on cigarette butts. They didn't match. It seemed unlikely that Weber was D. B. Cooper.

More recently, a Minnesota man insisted that his brother Kenneth Christiansen was Cooper. Lyle Christiansen said that his late brother looked like the FBI sketch of Cooper, worked for a commercial airline, and was a former paratrooper. The FBI said that Kenneth Christiansen was not a viable suspect because he was 150 pounds and 5 feet, 8 inches, at least four inches shorter and 30 pounds lighter than the description flight attendants on the hijacked plane gave police. His complexion was lighter and his eye color was hazel, not brown.

Over the years the FBI has investigated about 1,000 suspects, tracked down leads across the country, and scoured the aircraft for evidence. "Most [suspects] fitted the description; most had what seemed to be unaccounted sources of income; there were questions about where many of them were at the time of the incident; and some had parachuting backgrounds," Himmelsbach said. However, none turned out to be the hijacker.

## COLD CASE

The FBI believes that Cooper was killed when he jumped out of the plane. Seattle-based FBI special agent Larry Carr was only four years old when the hijacking occurred. He is the latest agent to be assigned to the unsolved hijacking despite the fact that the statute of limitations on prosecution has run out. "It's beyond its expiration date, but I asked for the case because I was intrigued with it," he said in a newspaper interview. "I remember as a child reading about it and wondering what had happened."

Carr does not believe that Cooper survived. "We originally thought Cooper was an experienced jumper, perhaps even a paratrooper," the special agent said in a newspaper interview. "We concluded after a few years this was simply not true. No experienced parachutist would have jumped in the pitch-black night, in the rain, with a 200-mile-an-hour wind in his face, wearing loafers and a trench coat. It was simply too risky. He also missed that his reserve chute was only for training and had been sewn shut, something a skilled skydiver would have checked." Cooper made a critical and likely deadly mistake when he used an emergency parachute and a training parachute that had been sewn shut instead of the two best parachutes at his disposal. He also did not ask for warm clothing, a helmet, and goggles. It was clear that

he didn't have an accomplice since he didn't give the pilot a precise route to follow to a specific drop zone.

In December 2007, the FBI released new composite sketches of D. B. Cooper and information on its Web site in hope of closing the case. Other material included photos of some of the recovered money, of a necktie that Cooper removed before jumping, a mother-of-pearl tie pin, one of the parachutes he left behind and the canvas bag in which it came, and a map of the search area where the FBI thinks he landed. The Cooper file fills up several shelves in the basement of the FBI's Seattle field office. It includes Dan Cooper's boarding pass from November 24, 1971, with the phrase Portland-to-Seattle flight handwritten in red ink and all capital letters, a few deteriorated bills, and a pink parachute that Cooper discarded after he cut its strings to secure the money to his waist. A padded envelope holds his black J. C. Penney clip-on tie. There are about 20,000 documents, mostly from dead-end leads. A sign above the files reads, "Do not destroy. Historical value. National Archives."

Nearly 40 years after a man jumped out of a plane with a bag of money, the legend of D. B. Cooper persists. After his exploits made the news, people wrote songs and books, made a movie about him, and sold t-shirts of his likeness—all in honor of the first man to get away with hijacking a U.S. plane. Within less than a month after the incident, about 3,000 t-shirts inscribed with "D. B. Cooper where are you?" were sold.

In 1986, FBI agents Ralph P. Himmelsbach and Thomas K. Worcester published *NORJAK: The Investigation of D. B. Cooper*. They believed that Cooper died in the jump. Five years later Russell Calame, an FBI agent who worked the McCoy case, and Bernie Rhodes, a former parole officer, published *D. B. Cooper: The Real McCoy*. They suggested that McCoy was Cooper because he had newspaper clippings about Cooper in his car and his family claimed a mother-of-pearl tie clasp that Cooper left behind on the jet belonged to McCoy. Elwood Reid's novel *D. B.* presumed that the hijacker escaped to Mexico. In 1981, Roger Spottiswoode directed *The Pursuit of D. B. Cooper*, based on the book *Free Fall* by J. D. Reed and starring Robert Duvall, Treat Williams, and Kathryn Harrold.

Every year around Thanksgiving the Ariel Store and Tavern, a bar in southwestern Washington State, throws an 11-hour party to commemorate the anniversary of Cooper's mysterious jump. This village on the edge of Lake Merwin, about 10 miles east of Woodland, is

thought to be where he landed. A corner of the bar features newspaper articles and wanted posters for Cooper. The festivities draw up to 300 people from across the United States, and they include raffles for Cooper memorabilia, a Cooper-look-alike contest, and a competition to see who can tell the best story about what happened to Cooper.

Despite the legendary status that Cooper's story enjoys, his hijacking led to significant improvements to air travel security. A latching device (called "the Cooper Vane") now prevents the rear stairway from being opened in mid-flight. Peepholes are also standard in cockpit doors. In 1972, the Federal Aviation Administration decided that the electronic screening of passengers and carry-on luggage would be mandatory—not voluntary—for all scheduled U.S. flights.

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**Missing Sisters:  
The Disappearance  
of Katherine and  
Sheila Lyon (1975)**

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*In 1975, children played outside their homes with little supervision because families believed their children were safe. The disappearance of sisters Katherine and Sheila Lyon created public awareness about child abductions.*

Ten-year-old Katherine Lyon went to visit her neighbor on Plyers Mill Road, the same street where she lived with her family in Kensington, Maryland. Frances Kuester was the mother of two young daughters, and Kate (as she was known to family and friends) would occasionally come over and take toddler Cathy to nearby Homewood Park. On March 24, 1975, she wanted to see baby Judy, however, who was only a week old. Since the newborn was asleep, Kuester suggested that Kate stop by the next day. She would make sure that the baby was awake for the visit.

The next morning, radio personality and disc jockey John Lyon returned home at 6:30 AM after working the night shift at WMAL-AM in Bethesda. John was tired and climbed quietly into bed without waking his wife, Mary, and their four children. The kids were on vacation anyway that week for their spring break. While he slept, the rest of the household woke up at about 10 AM and had breakfast. Mary was concerned that the house should remain quiet to give her husband time to sleep. It was a warm, sunny day, and her two sons, 15-year-old Jay and nine-year-old Joe, headed to the schoolyard to shoot hoops.

Sheila, 12, and Kate decided to go to the Wheaton Plaza to see the mall's Easter exhibits and eat lunch at the Orange Bowl Restaurant. They were days away from their thirteenth and eleventh birthdays, and their parents planned to take them out for dinner the following weekend. Mary believed that they would be safe; it was a time when children wandered the neighborhood without any problems, and families watched out for one another.

The girls left the house between 11 AM and noon with barely \$4 between them, but it was enough to buy pizza at the Orange Bowl Restaurant and browse through the mall's shops. Their mother told them to be home by 4 PM. They took a half-mile shortcut by following a footpath through some woods and side streets over to Drumm Avenue and Faulkner Place to the plaza at the corner of University Boulevard and Veirs Mills Road. At the insistence of a friend, Mary Lyon went bowling.

The house was quiet when John Lyon woke up at noon. He did some work in the yard of their small white stucco house and then picked up

his wife at the bowling alley in mid-afternoon. After they drove home, he lay down for a nap. The boys returned and Jay showed off the new kite he had bought at Wheaton Plaza that afternoon. He had spotted his sisters there while he was shopping.

Kuester phoned Mary to find out when Kate would be coming over. She had made sure to have Judy awake, but Kate had not turned up. Mary said that they were at the Wheaton Plaza and she expected them home any minute, but by 5:45 PM there was no sign of Sheila and Kate. Mary was annoyed, because the girls knew that they were supposed to be home for dinner. She began frying up some chicken and waited for her daughters.

When the girls still had not returned by 7 PM, the Lyons called police. The search for the two girls began immediately. The Juvenile Aid Unit initially thought that Kate and Sheila might have run away, but they quickly dismissed the idea. The girls were younger than most runaways and they had not quarreled with their parents or their brothers before they disappeared. They also had taken very little money with them.

The community was optimistic that the girls would be found. At the time, many neighborhood children played outside with little parental supervision. When the photo of Sheila for her yearbook at Newport Mill Middle School became available, Principal Bob Redmond brought it to her mother.

Police learned from witnesses that the girls were standing outside the Orange Bowl Restaurant at about 1 PM. They were talking to a middle-aged man who was dressed in a brown suit. The unidentified man was carrying a briefcase that contained a tape recorder. Other children were talking into a microphone that he was holding. Jay Lyon said that he saw his sisters inside the restaurant at about 2 PM eating pizza. A friend reported that the girls were heading west down Drumm Avenue near Devon Street between 2:30 PM and 3 PM, which was the last time anyone saw them.

The police decided that the unknown man to whom the sisters were talking in front of the restaurant that afternoon was a prime suspect in their disappearance. A police artist created a sketch of him based on the information that investigators had received, but he was never found. They also circulated photos and descriptions of Katherine and Sheila, who both had blonde hair and blue eyes. Sheila also wore glasses.

For the next three weeks, John Lyon did not leave his house. Members of the couple's extended family arrived to help, including John's mother,

Mary's mother, two sisters, and a cousin. They looked after the family's shopping, cooking, and laundry. Meanwhile, police and neighbors combed the Kensington Heights area checking the woods, ponds, storm sewers, basements, and storage areas. They conducted an aerial search using planes, and scuba divers searched the water. Members of the National Guard and Montgomery County police searched two square miles of parkland in search of the girls, but they never found a clue.

Detectives interviewed sales clerks at the Wheaton Plaza, Lyon family and friends, and classmates of the two girls. Desperate for clues as to what had happened to their daughters, the Lyons turned to psychics, but to no avail.

For nearly a month, police placed a wiretap on the Lyon family telephone in case a ransom call came in. They wanted to be able to trace it. Every tip and ransom call was investigated. On April 4, 1975, a man phoned the family claiming that he had kidnapped and was holding Sheila and Katherine. He demanded that John Lyon bring a briefcase containing \$10,000 to a courthouse in Annapolis, Maryland, and leave it in a restroom. Although the money was left in the designated spot, the money was not claimed.

The man later phoned back and insisted that he was not able to collect the money because police had surrounded the courthouse. He was told that before any money would be offered to him again, he would have to show evidence that he had the Lyon sisters in custody. He replied that he would get back in touch with the family—but they never heard from him again. The unidentified man was not the only one to make a phone call to the family in the weeks after the girls' disappearance trying to extort money, but it was the most serious.

## SUSPECTS

A few days later, a man in Manassas, Virginia, claimed that at about 7:30 AM on April 7, 1975 he saw two girls who looked like Sheila and Katherine in the back of a 1968 beige Ford Station Wagon. The girls were bound and gagged in the moving car. The witness said that the station wagon's driver resembled the police sketch of the man who had been talking to children outside the Orange Bowl Restaurant the day that the Lyon girls went missing.

The witness claimed that he began following the driver, but that the man ran through a red light and raced west along Route 234 towards Interstate 66 in Virginia. The witness said the station wagon had a

Maryland license plate that was bent on one side. It bore the possible combination of letters and numbers DMT-6\*\* . At the time, this combination was issued in the Maryland areas of Cumberland, Hagerstown, and Baltimore. The story was investigated but led to a dead end. There were no vehicles with matching plates. Sheila and Katherine Lyon had vanished without a trace.

In August 1975, Mary Lyon told the *Los Angeles Times* how she managed to cope with the disappearance of her daughters. “The big thing is that we still have our two boys,” she explained. “You’re forced back into living when you have other children who have to be fed, clothed and washed. They need attention too—more than ever before.”

The case remained dormant for the next seven years. Then in April 1982, investigators searched the yard of a house that once belonged to Raymond Rudolph Mileski Sr. for clues connected to the Lyon sisters. The Suitland, Maryland, resident had murdered his wife and teenage son and wounded his younger son in November 1977 after an argument in the family home. In 1978, he was sentenced to 40 years in prison in connection with the double murder. Mileski claimed that he had some knowledge of the disappearance of the two sisters and would share information in exchange for better prison conditions for himself, but the search came up empty.

Nearly five years later, police thought that they might have a suspect in the case. On January 22, 1987, Fred Howard Coffey Jr., 41, was sentenced to 50 years behind bars for nine counts of molesting children in North Carolina. Two days later, he was charged with kidnapping and killing 10-year-old Amanda Marie Ray on July 18, 1979. He had lived mere blocks from her in North Carolina. Her bruised and battered body had been found in a wooded area near a lake shortly after her murder. Coffey was twice sentenced to death, but it was later commuted to life in prison on July 21, 1995. He was also suspected of killing five-year-old Neely Smith, who lived in the same apartment complex as Ray and disappeared on February 18, 1981, but to date he has not been charged in connection with that murder.

Police thought there might be a link with the disappearance of the Lyon sisters because Coffey bore a striking resemblance to the man who had been seen with the girls outside the Orange Bowl Restaurant in 1975. Coffey had also started working at a company in Silver Spring, Maryland, just a month after Kate and Sheila vanished. In March 1987, police began to consider him a suspect in that long dormant case, but investigators were unable to find evidence connecting him to that case.

Although the story has vanished from newspaper headlines, the case remains open with the Montgomery County Police Department. The girls' disappearance had a profound impact on the suburban communities of Washington, D.C. Parents became aware of the potential for child abductions and started to keep a closer eye on their children.

It also profoundly affected the lives of the Lyon family. In 1992, John Lyon joined the Montgomery County Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program as a victim assistant to help other victims of crime. Jay Lyon, who was 15 years old when his sisters disappeared, became a homicide detective with the Montgomery County police. In a local cemetery, a stone marker with the girls' names and birthdates is a reminder of the day that a community lost its innocence. Every March, Kuester thinks about Kate and Sheila Lyon, who disappeared only days after her own daughter Judy was born.

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Jimmy Hoffa used ties to organized crime to help him rise to the leadership of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. He disappeared in 1975. Library of Congress.

## **The Union and the Mafia: The Disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa (1975)**

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*The unsolved disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa highlighted the close ties between the Teamsters union and the Mafia.*

James Riddle Hoffa, who was born on Valentine's Day in 1913, was a fighter. He was seven years old when his father died, leaving Jimmy's mother alone with four young children. She held down three jobs to try to make ends meet. She cooked full time in a restaurant, cleaned houses, and took in laundry at home. Four years later, she moved her family from Brazil, Indiana, to Detroit in search of higher wages in factories.

Hoffa quit school when he was 14 and found a job as a stock boy in a department store. He worked 10 hours a day, six days a week for a total salary of \$12. After the stock market crashed in 1929, he began working the 12-hour night shift at the loading docks of a warehouse. The working conditions were poor and employees were paid 32 cents per hour, but only when they were unloading boxcars. It meant that they often sat for hours without receiving any wages to compensate them for their time.

Teaming up with two others, Hoffa led a strike of his 175-man night shift. He was only 17 years old. They refused to unload a shipment until the company agreed to negotiate for better working conditions. The teenager negotiated the first contract. The new union aligned itself with the Teamsters, who hired Hoffa as an organizer for Detroit's Joint Council 43.

Union organizing was nasty business. Employers used goons from the local mafia as strikebreakers and police supported companies rather than labor. Hoffa fought back. He hired members of another local gang to clash with employers' hired muscle. After being put into contact with members of the mob, Hoffa developed relationships that made the Teamsters successful.

The Teamsters controlled the trucking industry, so Hoffa would arrange to have the men refuse to unload the trucks until a targeted company agreed to let their employees unionize. Hoffa used his new-found power to convince employers to avoid labor trouble for a fee. Hoffa's power grew. By the age of 21, he had become the top Teamster in Detroit. In 1940, by age 27, he was chairman of the Central States Drivers Council and negotiated with employers in 23 American states. Within two years, he was the president of the Michigan Conference of Teamsters.

In 1952, the tough and ambitious Hoffa was elected the international vice president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. With support from the West, Dave Beck became president, but Hoffa had

set his sights higher. He controlled the Midwest and wanted to ensure that he had the support of the East. Since the Teamsters rebuffed his efforts, Hoffa convinced Beck to create seven “paper locals” in New York that listed a union man as the nominal charter holder. In reality, two members of the Thomas Luchese crime family ran them. Gangsters who worked for them staffed the locals. Five of the seven new locals did not have any members, but they would still be able to vote in the Joint Council election of 1957 in which Hoffa hoped to run as president.

However, Hoffa’s ambition nearly got him into trouble and almost cost him the union’s top job. In the mid-1950s, the McClellan Committee Senate hearings led by their chief legal counsel Robert F. Kennedy investigated labor racketeering. They found that Beck had embezzled more than \$350,000 from the union. Hoffa saw the investigation as an opportunity to increase his own power. He surreptitiously fed information to the committee that would contribute to Beck’s downfall. However, greed nearly led to his own demise—a man who had built a reputation for being smart.

In February 1957, Hoffa contacted Wall Street lawyer John Cye Cheasty because he needed some “special help” in connection with the McClellan Committee’s investigation. He wanted to plant someone on the committee’s staff to spy on their work and report back to him with documents relating to their investigation of the Teamsters. Cheasty seemed to be the perfect man for the job: he was a former Secret Service agent, Internal Revenue agent, and naval intelligence commander.

The deal was sealed during a meeting in Detroit. Hoffa would give Cheasty a \$1,000-retainer as part of an \$18,000 fee. If Cheasty was not able to land a job with the committee staff, he could still keep \$500 for his efforts. Cheasty flew back to New York and phoned Robert F. Kennedy, counsel to the McClellan Committee. “I have some information that will make your hair curl,” he reportedly explained.

After conferring with Committee Chairman John McClellan (who consulted Federal Bureau of Investigation director J. Edgar Hoover) Cheasty was offered a job at \$4,500 a year. He handed over to FBI agents \$700 of Hoffa’s \$1,000 retainer, and he kept the remaining \$300 to cover his expenses. Then he returned to New York, where his official job with the committee was to help investigate labor racketeering in that state. He would send information to Hoffa that the FBI had screened. Kennedy and McClellan were the only ones involved with the committee to know that Cheasty’s true role was to be the bait for the Teamsters leader.



However, information was not flowing as quickly as Hoffa wanted—and he was getting impatient with Cheasty. He told the lawyer to arrange for a job transfer on the committee to Washington, D.C. Cheasty arrived in the city the day after the Teamsters vice president came to attend a meeting of the Building Trades Unions. On a March afternoon, Cheasty phoned and set up a meeting with Hoffa, and at 7 PM that evening a taxi with Cheasty inside pulled up in front of the fashionable Dupont Plaza Hotel. Hoffa hopped in. While the cab cruised around, Cheasty slipped Hoffa an envelope containing copies of committee interviews with the main players in the Teamster investigation.

Armed with the information that he was after, a satisfied Hoffa stepped out of the cab and Cheasty joined him. He pressed twenty \$100 bills into the lawyer's hand and walked away. Unbeknownst to Hoffa, the taxi driver was an FBI agent and had witnessed the entire transaction between the two men. Cheasty phoned Hoffa's secretary the following day and set up another meeting in Washington for 11 PM. As the two men stood outside the Dupont Plaza, Cheasty handed Hoffa another committee document on onionskin paper. He tucked the paper inside his coat pocket, shook hands with Cheasty, and went back inside the hotel.

## HOFFA ARREST

The squat Hoffa, who was five feet, five inches tall and weighed 170 pounds, walked across the lobby and into an elevator. As the doors closed, one of the most powerful union leaders in the United States was surrounded by FBI agents. They frisked him and confiscated the onion-skin document that he had been given moments before. He was hauled off to the courthouse and arraigned on charges of bribery. The government's case against him appeared to be airtight, and it seemed that a conviction could put the brakes on his ruthless ascendancy to the presidency of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Hoffa was tried in June 1957 for bribing Cheasty with \$18,000. His lawyer Edward Bennett Williams portrayed Hoffa as a friend of the workingman, and the jury of eight blacks and four working-class whites reached a verdict of not guilty. A subsequent trial in New York for wiretapping the phones of members of his own union ended in a mistrial.

For the next two years, Hoffa would conveniently develop memory loss whenever he was called to testify before the McClellan Committee,

but the level of corruption within the Teamsters became evident as committee members interviewed a total of 1,525 witnesses and compiled 59 thick volumes of the testimony. They learned that the man who had climbed the ranks of the union by defending the rights of workers was now selling his power to employers to help make labor problems disappear. This was done at the expense of his own members.

By then, Teamster President Dave Beck had bowed out after being discredited for embezzling \$370,000 from the Western Conference of Teamsters and going to jail. In October 1957, Hoffa took over as the president of the nation's biggest labor union and its 1.4 million members, but Bobby Kennedy was not finished with him yet. In the late 1940s, the Teamsters union had negotiated such fringe benefits for its members as pension funds. The Central States Pension Fund was created in 1955, and its money came from the 400,000 Teamster members in 23 states who contributed every pay period. By 1961, the fund was growing by \$100 million a year. Hoffa used the money to help his mafia buddies invest in such deals as Las Vegas casinos and California real estate developments.

When Bobby Kennedy became U.S. attorney general in 1961, he created a special squad within the Justice Department to dig up enough evidence to convict Hoffa. With the support of the Labor Department and the FBI, the team included up to 150 federal employees. Hoffa was indicted for extortion, but his trial ended with a hung jury in 1962. Kennedy then charged Hoffa with jury tampering in that case and added other charges of embezzling \$1.7 million in union funds. Hoffa was convicted and sentenced to eight years in federal prison in 1964 and fined \$10,000. Having run out of appeals, he was finally incarcerated.

Hoffa entered Pennsylvania's Lewisburg Federal Prison in March 1967. He was placed in a maximum-security block nicknamed "Mafia Row." In a nearby cell was Tony "Tony Pro" Provenzano, a young captain in the Vito Genovese crime family who was involved in the Teamsters and became president of a New Jersey local in 1958. He was sent to prison in 1966 after being sentenced for extortion. He had extracted \$17,000 from a trucking firm to ensure that they would be protected from labor trouble. However, Provenzano and Hoffa had a falling out with each other while serving time together in prison.

Hoffa did not resign as president of the Teamsters when he went to prison. He put Frank Fitzsimmons in charge, believing that the malleable man would simply step down when Hoffa emerged from jail.

It is alleged that the Teamsters made significant campaign contributions to U.S. President Richard M. Nixon's 1968 election campaign, which helped influence Nixon to consider leniency towards Hoffa.

Not everyone wanted Hoffa back in circulation with the Teamsters. Fitzsimmons was worried about losing power when Hoffa was released from prison because Hoffa's jail time notwithstanding, he still held sway with the rank-and-file membership. Fitzsimmons wanted to keep the top job, and he started to curry favor with the Mob. For their part, the mobsters found him easier to deal with than Hoffa. After Provenzano was released from federal prison in 1970, he became a strong supporter of keeping Fitzsimmons as president of the Teamsters.

Nixon struck a deal with union leaders. Hoffa agreed to quit his post as president of the Teamsters before he would be released. He assumed that Fitzsimmons would hand back the reins of power once Hoffa was freed. Just before Christmas 1971, Nixon commuted Hoffa's prison term, but then Hoffa learned that he was barred from holding office in the union until 1980—or he would be sent back to jail. Undeterred, he fought the restrictions in court. He was determined to wrest control of the union from Fitzsimmons.

## MEETING WITH THE MOB

On July 30, 1975, Hoffa woke up early at the summer home on Michigan's Big Square Lake that he shared with his wife Josephine. The two had met in May 1936 on a picket line. Their two children, James and Barbara Jo, would both grow up to become lawyers. After making and receiving several phone calls, Hoffa told his wife at noon that he was heading out to meet Anthony "Tony Jack" Giacalone and two other men. Jo Hoffa knew Giacalone. He had visited the week before and her children had grown up in the same neighborhood as the mobster.

Hoffa climbed into his Pontiac and drove to his meeting at the Machus Red Fox Restaurant in the Detroit suburb of Bloomfield Hills at 2 PM. On his way, he stopped in at an airport limousine company in which he was a part owner. His partner, Louis Linteau, had played a key role in arranging the meeting between Hoffa and Giacalone. By 2:30 PM. Tony Jack still had not arrived. Hoffa phoned his wife to find out if his guest had called. During a phone call to Linteau, Hoffa complained that Tony Jack had stood him up.

But someone did show up to meet Hoffa that day. He was last seen leaving the parking lot of the restaurant in the backseat of a maroon

Mercury with three other men. The driver appeared to be Chuckie O'Brien, who had borrowed the vehicle from Joey Giacalone, Tony Jack's son. Hoffa knew O'Brien well. He had had an affair with O'Brien's mother Sylvia Pagano, and he treated Chuckie as his own son, helped support him, and gave him a union job at the age of 19.

On July 31, Hoffa's unlocked car was found abandoned in the restaurant's parking lot. Relatives filed a missing person report with the Bloomfield Hills police. That evening, O'Brien visited the Hoffa's house where family members had gathered. He left quickly, after Jim Hoffa argued about O'Brien's support of Fitzsimmons and accused him of knowing what had happened to his father. The family posted a \$200,000 reward for information leading to Hoffa's safe return.

## FEDERAL INVESTIGATION

FBI agents took charge of the investigation two days later and obtained a search warrant for Hoffa's car on August 8, 1975. They found O'Brien's fingerprints on a soda bottle under the passenger seat and on papers found in the glove compartment. He told a reporter for the *Detroit Free Press* that he had been with Giacalone at the time that Hoffa disappeared, but Giacalone denied it. O'Brien changed his story several times, as each person with whom he claimed to be at the time of Hoffa's disappearance refused to corroborate his alibi to the FBI. The FBI interviewed O'Brien on August 4, 1975.

Two weeks later, the police located and examined Joey Giacalone's car. They found bloodstains on the backseat that had come from a fish. O'Brien told investigators that he had borrowed the car the morning of Hoffa's disappearance to deliver a 24-pound salmon to a union vice president. Four trained dogs were given a piece of Hoffa's clothing to sniff. They detected his scent in the Mercury's backseat and the trunk. FBI agents also found a three-inch brown head hair in the car's back seat that proved to have characteristics similar to Hoffa's hair. Chemical tests found a tiny bit of blood on the hair, but not enough to establish whose body it had come from. Further testing at a later date reportedly confirmed traces of Hoffa's blood, hair, and skin in the back seat of the car.

Giacalone and Provenzano both denied that any meeting had been arranged to take place between them and Hoffa. In fact, they both had alibis for the day of Hoffa's disappearance. Giacalone had spent the late morning and that afternoon in and around the Southfield

Athletic Club near Detroit where he had a haircut and a massage. During the critical time of day when Hoffa disappeared, Giacalone was with a lawyer. Provenzano was playing a game of Greek rummy at his union hall in New Jersey. A grand jury was convened in Detroit on September 2, 1975. O'Brien, Giacalone, and Provenzano pleaded the Fifth Amendment before the grand jury, which failed to indict any suspects in Hoffa's disappearance.

The FBI thought that they had made a breakthrough in the case when convicted murderer Ralph Picardo, incarcerated in New Jersey's Trenton State Prison, claimed that Sal "Sally Bugs" Briguglio, his brother Gabriel, and Thomas Andretta had been involved in Hoffa's disappearance. Picardo said that he had received the information from Andretta's brother Steve, who had stayed in New Jersey to support Provenzano's alibi. When forced to testify after being granted immunity by a Detroit grand jury, Steve Andretta claimed that he, Thomas, Provenzano, and Sal and Gabriel Briguglio had all been playing Greek rummy at the union hall the day that Hoffa disappeared.

Picardo claimed that Hoffa's body was packed into an oil drum and left in a Jersey City garbage dump that belonged to one of Provenzano's business associates. Four FBI agents spent a week sifting through the litter at the 47-acre dump, where some piles of garbage rose as high as 60 feet. The search was called off before the entire area had been scrutinized. No bodies had turned up. However, garbage wasn't the only thing that investigators had to sift through.

Rumors about Hoffa's demise ran rampant. Another informant told the FBI that Hoffa's body had been shredded and burned through the mobster-owned Central Sanitation Services in Hamtramck, Michigan. Sniffer dogs did not find any trace of Hoffa. The FBI believed that too much time had passed for any scents to be detected. U.S. Senate investigators paid an informant \$25,000 for a tip that Hoffa's body was buried in a particular swampy field north of Detroit. They dug up the field but found nothing. A body discovered in northeast Pennsylvania in October 1977 was initially thought to be that of the former Teamster, but dental records proved that it was another Mob victim.

In 1989, the imprisoned Donald "Tony the Greek" Frankos said that Hoffa was killed because he wanted to regain control of the Teamsters union and the Mafia preferred working with the more amenable Fitzsimmons. At the time that Hoffa disappeared, it was rumored that U.S. President Gerald Ford would give the Teamster a full pardon, making him eligible to become involved in union business earlier than 1980.

According to the story that Frankos told investigators, Irish hitmen John Sullivan and Jimmy Coonan were hired to kill Hoffa. They went to Detroit with Sally Bugs Briguglio. Giacalone opposed the hit on Hoffa but was told to cooperate. He agreed to entice Hoffa to a meeting, under the pretense that it would be an opportunity to settle the longtime grudge he had with Provenzano. Chuckie O'Brien, whose life and that of his family were threatened, was also involved to put Hoffa at ease.

Hoffa left the Bloomfield Hills restaurant with O'Brien and Briguglio, apparently believing that he was on his way to a meeting with Giacalone and Provenzano. Instead, he was driven to a safe house in Mount Clemens, Michigan. Just as the car pulled up, Coonan stepped outside and shot Hoffa twice in the forehead with a .22-caliber pistol that had a silencer. Then Hoffa's body was carried into the basement and cut into pieces using a buzz saw and meat cleaver. The dissected body remained in a freezer until five months later, when Sullivan placed it in an oil drum and drove it to New Jersey. A cement-mixing company that was affiliated with the mob was working on an expansion of the New York Giants stadium in the Meadowlands. According to Frankos, Hoffa was entombed in concrete under the artificial turf. He was said to rest in front of section 107 of the stadium, beside the end zone. It turned out to be yet another blind lead.

In the decade following Hoffa's disappearance, 200 investigators were assigned to his case and some 16,000 pages of reports were filed, but the former union leader's body has never turned up. He was declared legally dead in 1982. Some of the men who were suspected of being involved in his disappearance were eventually convicted on unrelated charges. In 1978, Tony Provenzano was convicted of the 1961 murder of Anthony Castellito, a man who wanted to unseat him as president of his union local. Provenzano eventually died in prison.

On March 21, 1978, Sally Bugs was standing outside a restaurant in New York's Little Italy when two hooded men knocked him down and shot him with five bullets to the head and one to the chest. Government investigators speculated that the hit had been ordered to prevent him from trading information on Hoffa's disappearance in exchange for a deal in the Castellito case. Giacalone was convicted of tax fraud and sentenced to 10 years. O'Brien was given a year for extortion and was subsequently convicted for filing a fraudulent loan application.

In March 2001, modern forensics was used in hope of generating new information about the case. DNA tests matched hairs from Hoffa's

hairbrush to a hair found in the backseat of Charles O'Brien's car. A year later, the case was referred to Oakland County prosecutors for review. On August 29, 2002, prosecutor David Gorcyca announced that the DNA evidence found in O'Brien's car was not sufficient to support criminal charges.

By then, Hoffa's son James P. Hoffa had taken the helm of the Teamsters. He was sworn in as president on May 1, 1999. Hoffa's disappearance spawned more than theories about what happened to him. It also inspired many books, including the 2004 publication of *I Heard You Paint Houses* in which Charles Brandt claimed to solve the mystery based on the "deathbed" confession of Hoffa's friend Frank "The Irishman" Sheeran. Hoffa's body has never been found, and no one has ever been charged in connection with his disappearance and presumed murder.

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Actor Robert Crane rose to fame as Colonel Robert Hogan in the television series *Hogan's Heroes*. CBS/Photofest.

# No Hero: The Murder of Actor Robert Crane (1978)

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*The investigation into Robert Crane's murder highlights some of the errors that can impair the police's ability to solve a crime. Mistakes included failing to conduct searches of key witnesses, allowing items to be removed from the victim's apartment and placing pieces of evidence in one large bag thereby tainting them.*

Actor Bob Crane and his friend John Henry Carpenter were united in their keen interest in chasing women at bars, clubs, and parties. When they met in the mid-1960s, Crane was married to his childhood sweetheart Anne Terzian and had three children, Robert David, Deborah Ann, and Karen Leslie. He was a high school dropout who loved music and played the drums. He began working as a disc jockey in 1950 at a small radio station in New York State.

Six years later, KNX in Los Angeles hired Crane to be the disc jockey on their morning drive show. The show was a hit, and Crane was earning \$150,000 a year by the early 1960s. But he yearned for more. While being a DJ by day, he trod the boards in his off-hours as an actor in small theater productions in the Los Angeles area. This opened the door to small television parts, including an episode of the *Dick Van Dyke Show* and the *Donna Reed Show*.

Crane's big break came in 1965 when he was cast in the starring role of Colonel Robert Hogan on *Hogan's Heroes*. Crane quit his radio job. The comedy series, which aired on CBS television, was set in a prisoner of war camp during World War II. In it, Hogan led a group of American prisoners who tried to outwit their German guards, Colonel Klink and Sergeant Schultz. The program was a hit, and the role turned Crane into a national television star. Twice, he was nominated for an Emmy Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role in a Comedy Series.

By then, John Henry Carpenter was working as a regional sales manager for Japanese electronics giant Sony. As part of his job, he taught customers how to use their new videotape machines. Clients included comedian Red Skelton, film director Alfred Hitchcock, singer Elvis Presley, and actor Richard Dawson, who was appearing on *Hogan's Heroes* as Peter Newkirk. While Carpenter was paying Dawson a visit on the set of the show one day, the actor introduced him to Crane. The two men became friends.

For years, Crane had been taking Polaroids and home movies of his sexual conquests. Carpenter showed Crane how to operate a videocassette recorder, which the television star began using to film his extramarital

sexual encounters. His status as a celebrity helped attract women. The image of the family man that he presented to the outside world was in stark contrast to his less-known persona as a man who was becoming increasingly interested in privately documenting his sexual conquests on video. He is said to have paid a doctor to surgically place implants in his penis to look well endowed.

In 1970, Crane divorced his wife of 21 years and married his *Hogan's Heroes* co-star Patricia Olson four months later. *Hogan's Heroes* ended its run in 1971, and the cancellation of the television series began the decline of Crane's career. He briefly starred in the *Bob Crane Show*, which aired on NBC in 1974 and 1975, where he played a former insurance salesman who went back to school to become a doctor. That series was cancelled after only 14 weeks, and Crane turned to the regional dinner-theater circuit to earn a living.

Carpenter had changed jobs and had begun working as the national sales manager of the Akai Corporation. He would arrange his business trips to coincide with the location of Crane's dinner theater engagements. The two men would generally meet up during the last week of Crane's run. By then, the actor would have had an opportunity to meet many women, and he would share his windfall with Carpenter by introducing him to the women as his manager. For his part, Crane carried his video equipment wherever he went. Some women were filmed and photographed with their consent while others were unaware that their sexual trysts were being taped. One tape showed Crane and Carpenter simultaneously having sex in Texas with a woman that Crane had picked up.

On June 6, 1978, Crane began appearing in the play *Beginner's Luck* at the Windmill Dinner Theater in Scottsdale, Arizona. He was separated from his second wife by then. The theater had rented several apartments for its actors, including one for Crane. On June 25, Carpenter flew to Phoenix on business for the Akai Corporation and to spend four days with Crane. The *Hogan's Heroes* star met him at Sky Harbor Airport and showed Carpenter an album of photos of naked women as they drove to Scottsdale. During his three weeks in Arizona, Crane had sex with at least eight women. Carpenter checked into the Sunburst Motel near Crane's apartment. After Crane's theater performances, the two men would visit bars and nightclubs to meet women.

Three days later, Crane and his co-star, 28-year-old Australian actor Victoria Ann Berry performed onstage at the Windmill Theater in the evening. They had been touring together for months in

*Beginner's Luck.* When the show ended that evening, Crane and Carpenter headed out to Crane's car. They stopped at a nearby gas station to fix a flat tire before heading to Crane's apartment. While they were there, Crane had a loud argument over the telephone with his estranged wife Patty.

Crane was not a drinker and did not smoke, but he was itching to go out. Just before midnight he and Carpenter went to a Phoenix nightclub called Bogarts. They met a woman there, called Carole Newell, and decided to go elsewhere for breakfast. Crane phoned Carolyn Baare, another woman whom he had met during his stay in Arizona, and invited her to join them for coffee. On the way to Safari restaurant Crane stopped to drop off Carpenter and Newell in Scottsdale so that they could pick up Carpenter's car.

After an early-morning breakfast, the foursome left the restaurant at 2 AM on June 29, 1978. Carpenter brought Newell back to his hotel room and began making sexual advances towards her. Newell rebuffed him and asked that he take her home at 3 AM. He did. When Carpenter returned to his hotel room, he phoned Crane to see if he had had better luck with Carol Baare. Crane said that he had struck out, too.

The next morning, Carpenter checked out of the Sunburst Motel at 8:24 AM and returned his rental car at the hotel's Avis counter. He told the agent that it had electrical problems, and then he took a taxi to the Phoenix airport and flew back to Los Angeles on Continental Airlines. He picked up his own vehicle and drove to work.

At about 2 PM that afternoon, Berry knocked on the door of Crane's ground-floor apartment, 132-A, in the Winfield Apartments in Scottsdale. There was no answer. She tried the handle and discovered that the door was unlocked. She opened it and stepped inside the two-bedroom apartment. It was dark. She called out Crane's name, but there was no response. Berry thought that perhaps he was at the pool. She opened the curtain that concealed a sliding glass door to the exterior and peered outside. There was no sign of her co-star.

## **BODY IN THE BEDROOM**

Then Berry walked slowly into the bedroom. There was a body curled up on its side in a fetal position in the bed and an electrical cord was tied around its neck. The wall behind the head of the bed was covered in blood. There was more blood on the sheets, and brain matter was splattered on the pillow. At first, Berry was not sure whose body it

was, but she knew that something terrible had happened. She raced out of the apartment looking for help.

The first Scottsdale police officer to arrive on the scene was Paulette Kasieta. On closer inspection, Berry identified the bloodied body in the bed as that of Bob Crane. Police Lieutenant Ron Dean arrived at about 3 PM and took over the investigation. He asked Berry to sit down in Crane's kitchen to write out her statement about finding the body.

The telephone rang at 3:15 PM and Dean told Berry to answer it but not reveal any information about the presence of a murder victim in the apartment. She picked up the receiver. It was John Carpenter calling, and that is when Dean took the phone from Berry and identified himself as a police officer investigating an "incident" at Crane's apartment. At first Carpenter told the investigator that he had last seen his friend at 1 AM, and then later he said it was actually 2:45 AM. Unable to get any information about Crane from the investigator, Carpenter phoned Bob Crane Jr. to tell him that something was going on at his father's apartment. Crane Jr. phoned and spoke with Dean, and Carpenter called again at 3:30 PM.

Meanwhile, the police investigation was underway. Crane's body was discovered curled underneath a sheet, dressed in shorts and an undershirt. Although an electrical cord was tied around his neck, he had died from several blows to the head. Blood was found on the inside doorknob of the master bedroom. He had been murdered on July 13, 1978, two weeks shy of his fiftieth birthday.

Maricopa County medical examiner Heinz Karnitschnig found that Crane had been hit at least twice in the side of the head with a heavy object. It had fractured his skull and killed him within a minute sometime in the early morning hours. It appeared that he had been struck with a blunt instrument such as a pipe or a wrench. Crane was beaten to death in his bed by what was initially believed to have been a tire iron or jack handle. The electrical cord, which came from a video camera, was tied on tightly after he died.

Who had killed Crane and why? Dean and case officer Dennis Borkenhagen searched the apartment for clues. Neither the front door nor the sliding glass door showed signs of forced entry. Oddly, both were unlocked, although Crane was known to keep his doors locked. Either someone had a key or Crane had left the door unlocked. Either way, he likely never saw his killer. The room in which he died was virtually undisturbed, and nothing valuable appeared to be missing. Police found Crane's watch, wallet, money, jewelry, and expensive video and

photography equipment which eliminated robbery as a motive. There were no signs of a struggle or of a murder weapon, although blood that was wiped from the weapon was found on the corner of Crane's bed sheet. Based on the position of the body, it appeared that Crane had been attacked and killed while he slept. "In my opinion, he was asleep, he didn't know what hit him," Karnitschnig told reporters. Since there were no signs of a struggle or forced entry, police believed that the killer might be someone that Crane knew. The crime was not one of passion over the womanizer, but rather a well-planned attack that took Crane by surprise.

## POLICE INVESTIGATION

As investigators searched the house, they discovered Crane's collection of pornographic videotapes that featured many women with whom he had slept. Some were aware that they were being taped while others only learned of it after Crane died and police informed them. There were also stills of men and women, but no sign of the photo album of pornographic pictures that Crane had shown to Carpenter. They also found a mini-darkroom inside one of the apartment's bathrooms and a photo enlarger resting on the back of the toilet. Negatives of naked women were waiting to be developed.

Police decided to try to reconstruct Crane's activities and whereabouts for the last 12 hours before his body was found. They questioned at least 50 of his friends and acquaintances, including his estranged wife Patty, members of the cast of *Beginner's Luck*, and their friends. It was during this part of their investigation that they learned of his outing the night before and his friendship with Carpenter. Carpenter was also the last person known to have talked to Crane by phone the morning of the slaying.

Police interest in Carpenter as a potential suspect grew when they found the rental car on June 30, 1978, that he had used during his four-day visit. They located the 1978 Chrysler Cordoba at the Avis counter inside the Sunburst Motel. While scrutinizing it, Scottsdale police detective Darwin Barrie noticed what appeared to be a tiny amount of dried blood on the car's interior on the passenger side. He called Lieutenant Dean to tell him what he had found.

A tow truck brought the vehicle to the Arizona Department of Public Safety's compound for examination. Department criminologist Bruce Bergstrom took a closer look at the bloodstain and found that it was

from someone who had type B blood. Only about one in seven people have this type of blood, and Crane was one of them. Carpenter was now the prime suspect in his friend's murder. Police also learned from a maid at the Sunburst Motel that she had found a bloody washcloth and pillowcase in his room, but she had not kept the items.

The following day, Dean and Borkenhagen flew to Los Angeles to speak to Carpenter. He flew back to Arizona with the two police investigators and agreed to answer questions without the presence of a lawyer. It was then that the officers learned about the missing photo album of nude women. Carpenter said that he had seen it in Crane's bedroom the day before the murder—but police never found it.

Carpenter returned to California, where Scottsdale police attempted to speak with him again on July 14. Police believed that Carpenter had killed Crane, but Carpenter denied it. "He was my friend," he told officers. "And he was the goose who laid the golden egg for me, in terms of meeting ladies." Carpenter offered to take a lie-detector test (which was inadmissible in court) but police refused.

The Scottsdale police brought their evidence against Carpenter to Maricopa County State Attorney Charles Hyder. They wanted to obtain an indictment for murder and an arrest warrant to bring their suspect to Arizona for further questioning, but Hyder refused to press charges. Police had been unable to establish physical evidence linking the suspect to the crime. In an era before DNA testing was available, there was no proof that the type B bloodstain found in Carpenter's rental car came from Crane. Hyder believed that there was not enough evidence to show "probable cause" that Carpenter had committed the murder.

Crane's body was returned to Los Angeles in early July for burial. Family members and more than 200 friends attended the funeral mass held at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Westwood. Reverend Bernard Lohman, a close friend of Crane's, conducted the service. The *Hogan's Heroes* star was buried at Oakwood Memorial Park in Chatsworth. Pallbearers included his co-stars Robert Clary and Larry Hovis, series producer Edward Feldman, and celebrities Carroll O'Connor, John Astin, and Patty Duke Astin.

In November 1980, the Scottsdale police approached the newly elected Maricopa County State Attorney Tom Collins. They urged him to prosecute Carpenter, their key suspect in Crane's murder. He reviewed the evidence in 1981 and agreed with his predecessor's decision that there was insufficient evidence, and there the case rested for nearly a decade. By February 1990, information about the investigation filled three,

six-inch thick binders in the police department. Officers had not given up on closing the case.

## SUSPECT ON TRIAL

Richard Romley succeeded Collins as Maricopa County Attorney in January 1989, and in the spring of 1990 he created a special panel of 15 attorneys and investigators to review the case. Scottsdale police detective Barry Vassall teamed up with Jim Raines, a former Phoenix police detective who was working as a county attorney's investigator. They began combing through the case looking for new or overlooked evidence.

In January 1992, Romley announced that new evidence had been found implicating Carpenter in Crane's murder. They had come to believe that Crane was killed because he was growing tired of Carpenter hanging around with him. Carpenter felt threatened, the theory went, because he saw that his access to women was in danger of being cut off. Carpenter had apparently been seen arguing with Crane at a nightclub days before the murder. The review panel believed that he had crushed Crane's skull with a camera tripod. Police also found it suspicious that Carpenter flew back to Los Angeles the day of Crane's murder.

Carpenter was on his way to work at a video repair shop on June 1, 1992 when he was arrested and charged with first-degree murder. He was jailed without bail in a Los Angeles jail awaiting extradition to Arizona. Before the case against Carpenter, then aged 64, could proceed, he was ordered to stand trial in California in July 1992 on charges of molesting two girls. He was accused of molesting a girlfriend's 10-year-old daughter and her 12-year-old playmate in 1988. The woman's daughter did not come forward for four years because of threats from her mother. The charges were prompted when the youth finally made the allegations, and Carpenter faced up to 12 years in prison if convicted. He pleaded not guilty to three counts of child molestation.

California authorities finally extradited Carpenter to Arizona just before Christmas 1992 to face the murder charge. He was held at the Maricopa County Jail while awaiting a preliminary hearing to decide if there was probable cause that he had murdered Crane. At the conclusion of the hearing in early 1993, Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Gregory Martin ordered Carpenter to stand trial on a charge of first-degree murder. He was released on a bond of \$98,000.

Jury selection for the trial began on September 7, 1994. Twelve jurors and four alternates were picked from an initial pool of 99 people. Carpenter arrived in court looking relaxed and holding hands with his wife Diane. The couple had been married in December 1955 but was separated for 13 years beginning in the mid-1960s. They later reconciled.

The trial got underway on September 12, 16 years after Crane was murdered. Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Martin presided. The prosecution presented evidence that the blood found in Carpenter's rental car was type B, the same as Crane's. Of all the people who were believed to have ridden in the car when Carpenter had it, only Crane had type B blood. The new evidence that they offered was a police photograph showing an irregularly shaped dark speck about one-sixteenth of an inch in diameter on the inside passenger door of Carpenter's rental car. The prosecution's experts who examined the photo said that the speck on the car door was likely to be brain or fat tissue from inside Crane's skull. The defense countered that it was impossible to prove since the actual piece of evidence had been destroyed.

In the weeks before Crane's death, he was known to have had two tripods with him. Patricia Crane testified that her husband often videotaped himself having sex with women that he met on the dinner theater circuit. She said that he had an extensive video and electronics collection and that he always carried his video equipment with him on road trips, including several camera tripods. Only one was found in Crane's apartment after his murder. Was the other one the murder weapon?

Forensic investigators testified that they smashed a small photography tripod into a clay model of a human head. They discovered that it produced a wound similar to Crane's. Expert witness Rod Englert of the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office in Portland, Oregon, said that based on blood spatters and other evidence, Crane was hit in the head at least three times. Blood stains on his bed sheet showed two parallel lines slightly curving inwards to a V that were "consistent with a tripod." Hand smear marks on Crane's upper back indicated that he had been beaten before the electric cord was tied around his neck. This led investigators to believe that Carpenter had beaten the actor with one of the tripods and then disposed of the murder weapon.

To prove the existence of the tripod, the prosecution showed the jury a video of Crane and Carpenter having sex simultaneously with the same woman. It also illustrated the relationship between Crane and Carpenter, who shared their sexual exploits. Lawyers argued that



Carpenter had killed Crane because Crane wanted to end the friendship that gave Carpenter access to women who were attracted by the actor's fame. Robert Crane Jr. testified that in the weeks before his death, his father complained that Carpenter had become a nuisance and that the actor wanted to end the friendship. Defense lawyer Stephen Avilla, however, argued that a jealous husband or boyfriend could have also had a motive to kill Crane.

Walter "Lee" Fetty testified that he was helping move furniture in Crane's apartment complex the morning of the murder. He saw a man step out of Crane's apartment, look around, and go back inside. The man emerged a second time shortly before the body was found. He asked Fetty for a light for his cigarette and spoke with him briefly. He also complained that the moving truck was blocking his car. The man was five feet nine inches, had black hair with silver streaks, and was wearing black slacks, black loafers, and a white shirt. Police didn't question Fetty about what he saw until a friend of his contacted police years later.

Carpenter's six-week trial ended on October 31, 1994. After deliberating for two-and-a-half days, the jury acquitted him. Carpenter's wife Diane sat on the bench behind her husband, sobbing, "It's over, it's over," when the verdict was read. After nearly two decades of being under suspicion, a jury had cleared him in connection with his friend's death.

Accusations that the Scottsdale police department had bungled the high-profile investigation did not end, however. Berry, who found Crane's body, did not tell police until later that she and Crane had slept together twice. She was allowed to answer the telephone at the crime scene, likely before technicians had had a chance to dust it for fingerprints. Police never searched the large handbag that she carried with her. They placed the evidence that they collected into one large bag, which could potentially taint individual items. Crane's son and his business manager were allowed to take items from the apartment the day after the murder, but before the apartment's contents had all been checked for possible fingerprints. Detectives quickly focused on Carpenter as a prime suspect but did not search his hotel room.

Carpenter did not savor his victory for long. He died in 1998. Three years later, Paul Schrader directed *Auto Focus*, a biopic about Bob Crane starring Greg Kinnear as Crane and Willem Dafoe as Carpenter. It opened in theaters and appeared at the New York Film Festival. The secret about just who killed Bob Crane remains.

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Julie Patz, mother of Etan Patz, appeared on NBC-TV's *Today* show in New York City on March 26, 1981. AP Photo/Pickoff.

## The Milk Carton Kid: The Disappearance of Etan Patz (1979)

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*Etan Patz became the first missing child whose photo was placed on the side of milk cartons. His disappearance led to the designation of May 25 as National Missing Children's Day, the creation of a computer registry of missing children and the founding of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. In the wake of this tragedy, new software was created to illustrate what victims could look like as they age.*

Etan Patz was an outgoing, cheerful, and self-sufficient little boy. The six-year-old, whose name meant “strength” in Hebrew, was small for his age. He attended grade one at Public School 3 and was learning how to read, and he asked his parents to read him a story each night before bed. He lived in a loft in New York’s SoHo district with his parents, Stan and Julie, sister, Shira, 8, and brother, Ari, 2. SoHo was a 43-square block area in Lower Manhattan. Stan was a commercial photographer and his wife ran a daycare center for toddlers.

On May 25, 1979, Etan put on a pair of blue pants, a t-shirt, light blue sneakers, a blue corduroy jacket, and an Eastern Airlines cap that said “Future Flight Captain” on it. He had been begging his parents to let him walk to the bus stop by himself. That day, Julie finally relented. After all, children often walked to school by themselves. Besides, it was less than two blocks from their loft at 113 Prince Street to the school bus at West Broadway and Prince Streets. Just before 8 AM, Etan picked up his blue cloth schoolbag with elephants printed on it and put it on his shoulder. He had a dollar in his pocket. His mother unlocked the door and followed him down the stairs. She kissed him goodbye, gave him a hug, and told him to have a good day. Then she watched him for a few moments stride down Prince Street on that misty, gray spring morning until he reached Wooster, and then she went back upstairs. Mailman Dorsey Whitaker saw Etan stopped at the corner of Wooster, but continued along his route.

When Etan had not returned home by 3:30 PM, Julie began to worry. She phoned a neighbor to find out if he was over at their house, and that is when she learned for the first time that he had never arrived at school. The school had never contacted the Patzes to alert them to his absence. Twenty minutes later, she called Stan while he was at a photo shoot and also informed the police.

Officers arrived and began asking the couple if they had any relatives or friends who could possibly be involved in Etan’s disappearance. This was standard procedure, but they knew no one who would want to

harm their son. Stan Patz walked into his darkroom and began printing photos of Etan. Then he showed them to storekeepers and any other place where he thought Etan might have gone that morning. He even stopped people on the street, but no one had seen him.

## SEARCH FOR ETAN PATZ

Led by detective Bill Butler, the police launched a door-to-door search in SoHo that evening. The next day, officers had bloodhounds sniff Etan's clothes, and then they patrolled the neighborhood trying to pick up the little boy's scent. But it was gone. Helicopters flew over Manhattan's rooftops, and boats traveled the rivers bordering the island. More than 300,000 flyers were distributed, and Etan's picture and the story of his disappearance ran in the tabloids every day. A task force of 500 police officers looked for him. A small boy who had blue eyes and blond hair and looked just like Etan was stopped by police 11 times, until his mother finally cut his hair. The door-to-door search ended on June 6, 1979, having turned up no leads.

Butler, a 25-year veteran of the police department, turned to his six children to help blanket their Brooklyn neighborhood with posters of Etan Patz. Four of his children would eventually become police officers. Like the Patzes, he wanted to believe that Etan had been abducted by someone who wanted a child of their own, but there was no evidence supporting that conclusion. At the time, there was no national clearing-house for finding and identifying missing children. Although there was a national system for tracking stolen vehicles, no one really kept statistics on the number of missing people, including children.

Etan's disappearance galvanized the people in his neighborhood. For weeks they brought meals for the Patzes, and many police officers came to help with the search on their days off. For more than a month, Etan's best friend and the boy's parents spent their spare time hanging posters and looking for Etan. Bob Rafter, an artist and electrician, stopped working for a month after the disappearance and spent his time raising money and printing flyers. "I wasn't close to the Patzes," he told a reporter, "but I've got a kid who's 10 years old. It could have been him. It's my neighborhood."

The neighborhood SoHo Cooperative Playgroup cancelled its annual reunion picnic that had been scheduled for May 26. Instead, 20 parents met to discuss how they could help find Etan. The group, which eventually grew to 170 members, was called the Etan Patz Action Committee.

They help put up posters of Etan in subways and restaurants and on storefronts and streetlamps. But there was no sign of him. In desperation, the police hypnotized Julie, Whitaker, and neighbor Sylvia Law who was out on the street at the time that he disappeared, but it did not turn up any new information.

For the Patzes, the vigil continued. They kept the same telephone number—"It's the number Etan knows," they told a reporter. They tape recorded every telephone call they received so that they could give police the exact message to listen to for possible clues as to their son's whereabouts. They maintained a detailed log of each call. After four months, Stan returned to work. The case also created fear. After Etan's disappearance, one little girl would stop every day at the phone booth near the school bus stop and call home. "I'm at the corner. Mama I'm OK," she would say. Children began traveling in pairs.

Leads continued to trickle in. Butler received a phone call in 1980 from a police sergeant in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho. He said that a woman reported seeing a man at a motel with a little blond boy who might be Etan. After investigating, police discovered that it was a man who had kidnapped his own son and had an arrest warrant in Wisconsin.

The case also attracted con artists. On May 21, 1981, a Long Island man was charged with attempting to extort \$2,500 from Stan Patz. He had implied that he could guarantee Etan's safety. Thirty-two-year-old James Slaughter was arrested near the West Hempstead Motor Hotel, where he had allegedly gone to collect payment from Patz. Slaughter was charged with attempted grand larceny and aggravated harassment. The situation also brought out the best in others, however. One anonymous donor offered a \$25,000 reward in 1982 for information leading to Etan's return or proof that he was dead.

On December 3 of that year, police found the photo of a boy who closely resembled Etan at a cottage that they raided in Wareham, Massachusetts. A group called the North American Man-Boy Love Association used the house. Three men were arrested. One of them said that he had seen a copy of the photo in an apartment in Manhattan. Consequently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation raided three apartments in Manhattan that belonged to members of a pornography group in an effort to find photos or any other clues about Etan. Nothing turned up. Julie and Stanley Patz looked at the photo, but they could not say with any certainty that the boy was their son. Then police learned that it was not, and that the photo had appeared in a calendar in 1968.

Media coverage of the raid and a possible connection to Etan's disappearance led a New York cab driver to step forward with another lead in the case. Chester Jones said that the day Etan went missing, he had picked up the boy and a man near the Patz home in SoHo. The man had blond hair, was about 30 years old, and weighed about 135 pounds. Apparently, the pair climbed out of the cab after seven blocks when the boy protested. He said that his parents had told him not to talk to strangers. And there the trail ended.

## POSSIBLE SUSPECT

In 1982, police caught what they initially thought could be a break in the case. They found a longhaired drifter named Jose Antonio Ramos living in a drainpipe in the Bronx. He was suspected of having tried to lure young boys there. Among his meager possessions were photos of young boys. Some were blond and one resembled Etan. During questioning, Ramos denied that he knew Etan, but he eventually admitted that he had dated a single mother who lived near the Patzes and who had looked after Etan. The woman later revealed to police that Ramos had repeatedly molested her own son, who subsequently committed suicide in the summer of 1999.

Stan and Julie Patz looked at the pictures that police found with Ramos. They were relieved that none were of their son, but they were also devastated that they were no closer to finding the truth about what had happened to Etan. Investigators could not find a strong link between Ramos and Etan to hold the drifter, so Ramos was released. He was picked up again five months later for soliciting sex from three underage boys. After placing him under observation behind bars for several months, Ramos was released. The Bronx district attorney said that he did not have enough evidence to charge Ramos in Etan's abduction.

Three years later, Stuart GraBois took on the case in 1985 when he became an assistant U.S. attorney. By 1988, police had four filing cabinets stuffed with information that they had gathered on the case. They had investigated thousands of leads from around the world, but none shed any light on the fate of Etan Patz. GraBois reexamined every piece of evidence, but he turned up no new clues.

Then GraBois decided that it was time to look more closely at Jose Ramos, who was now behind bars in Rockview State Prison in Pennsylvania. He was serving time after being convicted of child



molestation. Ramos had been driving around in an old school bus handing out toys, and he had lured a victim at the annual hippie gathering of the Rainbow Family of Living Light onto his bus. In 1987, Ramos was sentenced to three-and-a-half to seven years for indecent assault on a five-year-old child.

Ramos was brought to GraBois's office on June 28, 1988. Under questioning, the convicted sex offender said that he had picked up a small boy with blond hair in Washington Square Park on the day of Etan's disappearance. That was five blocks from the Patz family's loft. He then brought the boy back to his apartment for sex, but Ramos claimed that he never harmed the boy. He dropped him off at the subway heading to Washington Heights because the boy wanted to visit an aunt there. Etan Patz did not have an aunt living in the area. GraBois believed that Ramos knew more about the case than he was saying.

Unable to extract a confession from Ramos, GraBois tried a different strategy. In an unusual move, he was deputized as a deputy state attorney general in Pennsylvania in 1990 to prosecute a child molestation case against Ramos. He hoped this would give him the leverage that he needed to extract a confession or more information about Etan's disappearance and murder.

Ramos, 47, was charged with sexually abusing an eight-year-old boy from California in the Allegheny National Forest in 1986 during a hippies gathering of the Rainbow People. At his arraignment on August 30, 1990, Ramos pleaded not guilty to two charges of child molestation, but in October he decided to plead guilty to one count. The plea was accepted and the second charge was dropped in order to spare the young victim from having to testify. Ramos was sentenced to 10 to 20 years in prison. He would be eligible for parole in September 2000. GraBois, however, had not been able to gain new information from Ramos about Etan Patz.

In 1991, GraBois and FBI special agent Mary Galligan arranged to have Ramos transferred to the Federal Correctional Institution at Otisville. They placed a white-collar criminal that they called Jon Morgan in his cell in a protective segregation unit. It was part of an undercover operation to try to cement evidence against Ramos. Morgan shared with GraBois that Ramos was familiar with all the stops that Etan's school bus made in 1979. He knew that Etan's was the third one in SoHo. Ramos also talked about his former girlfriend who had looked after Etan. Ramos claimed that it would be impossible to charge him with murder since there was no body. After weeks without a confession,

Morgan was removed from the cell. Informant Jeremy Fischer went in and got to work. Ramos described how he had picked up Etan on Prince Street and assaulted the boy, but he refused to finish his story. Nonetheless, GraBois was convinced that Ramos had killed Etan and burned the body. The Patzes were, too.

The case was later determined to be outside of federal jurisdiction. GraBois turned over the evidence, including the information that he had gathered from jailhouse informants, to the New York County district attorney's office. Without a body, however, District Attorney Robert Morgenthau said that there was insufficient evidence to convene a grand jury and prosecute Ramos. GraBois left the U.S. attorney's office in 1993.

In 2000, the New York Police Department used modern forensic science to take another look at the case. The renewed interest was prompted by Ramos's impending parole hearing, advances in forensic science that had been previously unavailable, and a cellmate of Ramos who said that the suspect had told him, "Etan is dead, there is no body, and there will never be a body."

One morning in June 2000, a dozen police officers and detectives pulled up to the six-story red brick building at 234 East Fourth Street on the Lower East Side just before 8 AM. They went down into the dark basement where Ramos had lived in 1979, a mile from the Patz family's loft. During their eight-hour search, police pulled apart a rusted, unused 1939 coal-fired furnace and removed it in chunks. It had not been used since a new furnace was installed in 1998. They also filled a dozen blue plastic barrels with ash and dirt from the basement floor. They used DNA technology to try to find evidence that linked Ramos to Etan, but all that they found were the remains of dead animals. Detectives returned to the basement in August 2000. They drilled holes in the floor, but sniffer dogs were unable to detect signs of human remains.

## LEGALLY DEAD

On June 27, 2000, Ramos received a letter from the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole denying him parole. They believed that he was still a danger to society. He would not be eligible for early release until at least June 2003 and could be back on the streets in November 2012. In the meantime, Stan Patz wanted to prevent Ramos from benefiting from his crime. In June 2001, he had his son declared legally dead after a waiting period; although Julie Patz was not prepared to sign the papers declaring her missing son dead, she did not

oppose her husband's efforts to move forward. Etan Patz was declared legally dead 22 years after he mysteriously disappeared from a SoHo street.

This was the first step towards filing a wrongful-death suit against Ramos in civil court, where the burden of proof is less than in criminal court. At a hearing in 2003, Patz family lawyer Brian O'Dwyer presented evidence against Ramos, including the alibi that he offered in a deposition in April 2003. The convicted child molester claimed that he was in Washington Square Park with a six-year-old boy called "Jimmy" when police approached them at 11:15 AM to compare the boy to a photo of Etan. However, Etan was not reported missing until later that afternoon.

In 2004, Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Barbara Kapnick ruled that Ramos was legally responsible for Etan's death. The family was awarded \$2 million in compensatory and punitive damages, but it was clear that they would never see the money. That wasn't the point. They wanted justice for Etan, for his alleged killer to be held responsible. The ruling could also be used to deny Ramos parole and prevent him from profiting from the crime.

The case remains open, but Etan Patz leaves behind an important legacy. His disappearance raised public awareness about missing children. He became the first victim whose photo appeared on the side of milk cartons. In 1985, he was the first missing child that the New York City Police Foundation chose to feature on an electronic screen that overlooked Duffy Square. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan declared May 25 National Missing Children's Day. Americans were asked to keep their porch lights on "to light the way home."

That year, Julie and Stanley Patz, Camille Bell, and Reve and John Walsh—the parents of children who had disappeared or were murdered—spoke to Congress about the need for the federal government to establish and maintain a comprehensive national computer registry of missing children. At the time, the FBI's National Crime Information Center had only about 10 percent of missing children on their list, partly because local police departments were not required to report disappearances to the FBI. Republican senator Paula Hawkins from Florida and Democratic representative Paul Simon of Illinois introduced the Missing Children's Act to establish a computer registry of missing children. Parents could have their child listed if local law enforcement authorities did not do so. President Reagan signed the bill into law in October 1982. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children was founded two years later.

Another innovation that came to the fore following Etan's disappearance was a new type of software. Artist Nancy Burson and husband David Kramlich, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for Advanced Visual Studies, pioneered the development of "aging" software. The FBI and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children used it to project what someone may look like as they age. In 1984, Burson used the software to generate an updated image of what Etan Patz would have looked like at the age of 10. Although he was never found, other images she created helped locate other missing children. The FBI eventually bought the composite-imaging software.

Parents also began fingerprinting their children on cards, with the blessing of law enforcement officials. Programs were voluntary, and parents would keep the only records. On a Mother's Day weekend in New England, for example, 40 McDonald's restaurants promoted a "Thumbs Up!" fingerprinting event.

The story also inspired a book of fiction by the Patzes' neighbor Beth Gutcheon. *Still Missing*, released in 1981, was about the disappearance of six-year-old Alex Seiky. In 1983, the film *Without a Trace*, which was based on the book, was released. It was directed and produced by Stanley Jaffe, who had directed *Kramer v. Kramer*. It starred Kate Nelligan as the mother, and Judd Hirsch played a sympathetic police officer who had children of his own.

Although Etan Patz has been declared legally dead, New York Police Department case No. 836, listed as a "stranger abduction," remains officially open. Each year on Etan's birthday on October 9, and on the anniversary of his May 25 disappearance, Stan Patz sends Ramos an old poster of Etan's disappearance. On the back of it he writes, "What did you do to my little boy?" He doesn't expect an answer. He just wants to remind the convicted child molester that Etan has not been forgotten.

## FURTHER READING

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# **The Missing Medic: Kathleen Durst (1982)**

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*This case was marked by the disappearance of Kathleen Durst and the murders of Susan Berman and a Texas loner. Durst's body has never been found and Berman's killer has never been caught, but one common thread was Robert Durst, a man from one of New York's wealthiest families.*

Robert Durst appeared to have everything. He was the eldest son of real estate tycoon Seymour Durst, who owned skyscrapers and residential buildings in Manhattan. Robert grew up in the wealthy community of Scarsdale with his brothers Douglas and Thomas and sister Wendy. He graduated from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1965 with an economics degree, but he faced tragedy during his childhood when his mother Bernice, then 32 years old, committed suicide in 1950. He was only seven years old when she jumped from the roof of the family home. After university, Robert enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of California at Los Angeles. There, he met Susan Berman, the daughter of a Las Vegas mobster. He dropped out in 1969 without completing his degree, returned to New York, and began to work for his father.

Kathleen McCormack was an attractive blonde dental hygienist who had left her Long Island home at the age of 19. She moved into an apartment in Manhattan that was owned by the Durst Organization real estate firm. That is how she met Robert Durst. Although he was nine years older, they quickly fell in love. The couple moved in together in January 1972 and relocated to Vermont, where they opened a health food store called All Good Things.

Seymour convinced his son to return to New York to work for the family real estate company. Kathleen and Robert Durst married in 1973, within two years of having first met. While he worked for his family's business along with his younger brother Douglas, Kathie (as she was known to family and friends) attended nursing school at Western Connecticut State College. She graduated in 1978 and enrolled in medical school; she wanted to become a pediatrician and open a clinic for children.

Despite the family's wealth, Robert wanted to live in a frugal manner. He refused to pay his wife's tuition, so Kathie had to pay for her schooling. He drove a Volkswagen Beetle while she drove an old Mercedes. They lived in a penthouse in a cooperative apartment building on Riverside Drive near Seventy-Sixth Street. The marriage also grew increasingly stormy.

By 1981, Kathleen was complaining to friends that her husband was violent and had physically assaulted her. Her brother James watched his impatient brother-in-law grab Kathleen by the hair at her mother's house because he wanted to leave. On another occasion, he assaulted photographer Peter Schwartz because he did not depart quickly enough when Robert ordered everyone out of the apartment. In March 1981, Kathie told her friend Gilberte Najamy that she planned to divorce Robert when she graduated from medical school. She rented an apartment on East Eighty-Sixth Street as a sanctuary from the marital strife. Meanwhile, Robert was seeing other women, including Mia Farrow's sister Prudence and his friend Susan Berman.

On January 6, 1982, Kathleen went to the Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx to be treated for bruises to her face. Robert denied assaulting her. He claimed that she was making up stories to increase the amount of a divorce settlement that she was likely to receive. His 29-year-old wife was in her fourth year at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. She was four months away from graduating and had hired a divorce lawyer. She was afraid that Robert would kill her, and she told friends to look to her husband if anything happened to her. She clearly did not trust him.

On January 31, 1982, Kathleen phoned Najamy, her closest friend whom she had met in nursing school. Tensions were running high and she needed to take refuge from her husband and get away from their cottage in Westchester County. Najamy invited her over for dinner at her home in Newtown, Connecticut, but Kathleen left at 7:15 PM after her husband phoned at 7 PM and demanded that she return home. Before she headed out the door to make the 45-minute drive back to her lakeside cottage in South Salem, New York, the two women agreed to meet for dinner in New York City the following evening. "Gilberte, if something happens to me tonight, promise that you'll check it out. I'm afraid of Bobby," she told Najamy. A week earlier, Kathleen Durst had had dinner with cottage neighbor William Mayer and his wife. "If anything happens to me, suspect foul play and Bob," she told them.

Robert later told police that he and his wife drank a bottle of wine when she returned to their stone cottage overlooking Lake Truesdale. After more arguing, she announced that she was returning to their apartment in New York City. He dropped her off at the Katonah train station in South Salem to catch the 9:17 PM train to Manhattan. He said that he phoned her at about 11:30 PM to make sure that she had arrived safely home. When an investigator pointed out that telephone records could be used to confirm the information, Durst said that he had called



from a payphone near their cottage while he was out walking his dog. However, the nearest phone was three miles away, and there was a snowstorm that night. He told her family that he had phoned from a South Salem restaurant. He told officers that he stopped in for a drink with neighbors that night, but the neighbors did not recall his visit.

The next morning, a woman who claimed that she was Kathleen Durst called the school of medicine and told dean Albert Kuperman that she was too ill to attend class. The building superintendent at the Riverside Drive apartment where she lived with her husband initially said that he had seen Kathleen there on February 1. He later admitted that he only saw the woman from behind, so he could not be certain that it was Mrs. Durst. That evening, Najamy began to worry when Kathleen had not turned up to meet her at the *The Lion's Gate* in downtown New York City.

## DISAPPEARANCE

Unable to find her friend, Najamy phoned police repeatedly for the next few days to alert them and ask for help. Durst did not report his wife missing until four days later, on February 5, 1982, when he arrived at a police station on Manhattan's West Side with his dog in tow. He told Detective Mike Struk that he had not initially realized that his wife was missing because she sometimes slept at school in the final months leading up to her graduation. He only became aware of her disappearance after a dean at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine phoned to tell him that Kathleen had not turned up for classes all week.

By then, Robert had sublet Kathleen's apartment on East Eighty-Sixth Street and disposed of some of her clothing and books. Given that Kathleen Durst appeared to have been seen in Manhattan, police believed that she had arrived home from the Durst's cottage and disappeared while she was in New York City. Investigators did not conduct a thorough search of the couple's house in South Salem.

Najamy was not convinced that her friend had made it home to the city that Sunday night. A week after she last saw Kathie Durst, she boarded the 9:17 PM train from South Salem to Manhattan. It was only several cars long. After speaking with some of the passengers who had taken the trip the week before, she learned that none had seen her friend aboard a week earlier. Najamy returned to South Salem and broke into the cottage. She found Kathleen's unopened mail in the garbage and

also discovered inside Kathleen's closet the brown suede boots and a cable-knit sweater that Robert claimed his wife had been wearing when he dropped her off at the train station.

Durst placed an advertisement in the newspaper announcing that he was offering a \$100,000 reward for information that would lead to the discovery of his missing wife. Within a few weeks, however, the police spoke to the three people who said that they had seen or heard from Kathie Durst after she is said to have returned to Manhattan. The investigation ground to a halt. Detectives believed that she may have vanished deliberately in an attempt to flee a failing marriage. Circumstantial evidence suggested that Robert Durst had played a role in her disappearance, but police had no body and no physical evidence. In the ensuing media coverage after Kathleen's disappearance, Robert's friend Susan Berman acted as his spokesman.

Family and friends were convinced that Robert Durst knew more about his wife's disappearance than he was telling, however. They cited the conflicting stories that he told about what he did the night she went missing. Her sister, Mary Hughes, also found jewelry that Durst claimed Kathleen had been wearing when she went missing. In 1983, her mother filed a claim in Surrogate Court requesting that she be appointed the temporary administrator of her daughter's estate.

Before Kathie disappeared, she had given two friends confidential financial information for safekeeping. Within a year, one file was taken from Kathy Traystman's dresser drawer and the other was stolen from Najamy's home in Newtown, Connecticut, along with two boxes of items relating to Durst's disappearance. The burglaries have never been solved.

In March 1990, Robert Durst quietly filed for divorce on the grounds of abandonment after notices were published in the *Westchester Law Journal*. The petition was granted three months later. He moved into a luxurious apartment on Fifth Avenue with successful real estate broker Debrah Lee Charatan. Durst moved out nine months later; he didn't like the upper-crust neighborhood. He married Charatan on December 11, 2000, in a 15-minute private ceremony in a conference room that overlooked Times Square.

## REOPENED INVESTIGATION

The wedding came less than two months after the New York State police had reopened the investigation into Kathleen Durst's

disappearance and wanted to question him about some discrepancies in his story. State police investigator Joseph C. Beccera had decided to take another look at the case after an informant claimed to have relevant information. The Connecticut man had been arrested in Westchester County after exposing himself repeatedly. Although the tip that he provided did not prove to be useful, investigators were sufficiently intrigued by the case to reopen the investigation.

Witnesses who in 1982 said that they had seen Kathleen in Manhattan were re-interviewed. They admitted that they could not be certain the woman they saw was, indeed, Kathleen. In 2000, investigators concluded that Durst had disappeared from South Salem, and not from Manhattan as the earlier investigation had believed. Durst sold the 1,200-square-foot cottage in South Salem in 1990.

A decade later, investigators searched the property and sent police divers into Lake Truesdale to look for clues using a metal detector. They also removed part of a bedroom wall in the cottage and used police dogs to search the house after a former housekeeper said that she had seen a stain around the time that Kathleen disappeared. Police also wanted to interview Durst's friend Susan Berman, who was living in Manhattan at the time of the disappearance and had acted as Robert's unofficial spokesman.

By the time the investigation was reopened, Durst had moved away from New York. He had left the family business abruptly in 1994 when he learned that his younger brother Douglas would become head of the family's real estate empire. When Seymour Durst died in 1995, the Durst Organization was worth \$650 million. Meanwhile, Robert Durst drifted around the country, traveling between California, Connecticut, Texas, and Manhattan.

Two weeks after Durst's wedding to Charatan, his friend Susan Berman, 55, was found dead just as investigators were planning to interview her about Kathleen Durst's disappearance. She had been shot in the head in her California home in Benedict Canyon with a 9-millimeter handgun just a few days before Christmas 2000. The journalist, author, and screenwriter had been killed gangland-style. Berman was the daughter of Las Vegas mobster Dave Berman, an associate of gangsters Bugsy Siegel and Meyer Lansky. Her books *Lady Las Vegas* and *Easy Street* recount her experiences growing up amid the glitter of casinos.

Berman's neighbors called the police when they noticed that her dogs were running loose. Police found her body on the floor of her home. It was initially believed that her family's connections with organized

crime had led to her murder, but that theory was ruled out. There were no signs of forced entry, robbery, or a struggle, and no witnesses stepped forward. Berman had apparently told friends that Robert confessed to her that he had killed his wife. That led to speculation that Berman was killed because she knew too much about Kathleen's disappearance. Ballistics tests on a 9-millimeter handgun later found in the trunk of Durst's car proved to be inconclusive as to whether they matched the casings found in Berman's home. Her murder remains unsolved.

A year later, in November 2001, Manhattan Surrogate Court judge Renee Roth ruled that Kathleen Durst would be declared legally dead effective retroactively to February 1, 1987. Her estate of nearly \$130,000 would be divided between Durst and her family, but his share of about \$61,000 would be placed in escrow until the district attorney of Westchester County was able to determine if he was responsible for his wife's death. Durst's problems were far from being over, however.

## MURDER IN TEXAS

Just two months earlier, on September 30, 2001, a 13-year-old boy had been out fishing off Galveston Bay in Texas at dusk with his father. Suddenly, something in the water washing up against the rocks caught his attention. It was the dead torso of a man. He had been badly beaten, and his arms, legs, and head had been cut off. The head would never be recovered, but police divers did find a plastic bag containing the arms and legs. Inside one of the bags was a newspaper that had the address of a four-unit apartment building at 2213 Avenue K and a hardware store receipt for a saw.

Police searched the garbage in the building's alley and found a .22-caliber handgun that Durst had bought at a local sporting goods store on August 30. These clues helped police identify him and his victim. Morris Black was a cantankerous 71-year-old man who lived in an apartment across the hall from Durst. Neighbors said that the two men argued frequently. Police found blood on the walls and floors of the two men's apartments, and a trail in the hallway between them. They discovered a paring knife and bloody boots inside Durst's apartment. A neighbor saw him load some garbage bags into his car the day that Black's body was found.

Police arrested Durst more than a week later, on October 9, 2001, and charged him with Black's murder. A search of his Honda turned up a saw and a 9-millimeter handgun, the same caliber that was used

in Susan Berman's murder. They also found a dry cleaning receipt for a store in New Orleans, where Durst dropped off a blanket around the time of the murder. Although the comforter had already been cleaned, police retrieved it to test it for traces of blood.

Investigators learned that Durst had rented his apartment on Avenue K in Galveston in April after spotting it advertised in a newspaper. It was located in a fourplex and was sparsely furnished with a bed, a table, a television set, and a stove, but no telephone. He claimed to landlord Klaus Dillman that he was renting the place for his mute sister-in-law Dorothy Ciner. Police later discovered that he had borrowed the name of a high school classmate whom he had not seen since they had graduated from Scarsdale High School. Ciner had never been to Texas, she was not mute, or his sister-in-law. In fact, Durst would dress up as a woman and don a wig to masquerade as Ciner.

Durst also posed as a fictitious woman called Dorothy Winnie when he rented an apartment in New Orleans, and he used the name Jim Turss at a Holiday Inn Express in Galveston just before he was arrested. Besides the \$300-a-month unit, he had a luxury one in Dallas that he rented for more than \$3,000 a month. He wrote on a rental application that he had worked as a botanist for the Pacific Lumber Company in Eureka, California, and listed his income as being \$480,000 a year in salary and investments. He said that New York writer Julie Baumgold was his daughter. None of the information was true.

On October 10, Charatan sent Durst the \$300,000 bond that he needed to be released from jail in Galveston. Officials there were not aware that they were holding a member of one of New York's richest families. When Los Angeles police investigators and Westchester County District Attorney Jeanine Pirro learned of Durst's arrest, they flew to Galveston to meet with local investigators and question Durst about Berman's murder and Kathleen Durst's disappearance. He was to appear in court on October 16, but he failed to show up. A grand jury indicted him on charges of bail jumping and murder. With assistance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the police department in Galveston launched a nationwide manhunt.

## MANHUNT

Police began looking for Durst in New Orleans, where he had rented an apartment and was believed to have fled just after the Black murder. Investigators searched the unit after he abandoned it in October.

They found a videotape of a television program about Kathleen Durst that had aired in July and a silver medallion that had once belonged to Susan Berman.

Durst used Morris Black's South Carolina's driver's license and Medicare card for identification to rent a 1996 red Chevrolet Corsica from Rent-a-Wreck in Mobile, Alabama, on October 17. As he drove through Maryland, he stopped long enough to steal the license plates from another vehicle. Then he headed to Hanover Township, Pennsylvania, where he had attended Lehigh University in Bethlehem. He checked into the Staybridge Suites on November 18 under the name of Emilio Vignoni. He checked out on November 30, 2001. While he was on the lam, officials froze a New Jersey bank account in which Durst held \$1.8 million and from which his second wife attempted to withdraw money.

Durst was captured several hours later, after being on the lam for about seven weeks. It was the day before a segment about Kathleen Durst's disappearance was to air on the television program *America's Most Wanted*. He was caught at a Wegman's store in Hanover Township after trying to shoplift a sandwich and bandages at lunchtime, while he had \$500 on him. He had shaved his head and eyebrows while he tried to evade authorities. When he was arrested, he was wearing dark pants, black sneakers, and a black windbreaker. He was driving a rented red Chevrolet Corsica. He identified himself to the Colonial Regional Police Department as Robert Durst and said that he was in town to visit his daughter, who was attending university. In fact, Durst has no children.

Police quickly realized that the shoplifter they had just picked up was wanted for murder in Galveston. He was held at the Northampton County Prison until he could be extradited to Texas to face charges. Detectives opened the trunk of his rented red Corsica on December 5, 2001, in the presence of investigators from Galveston and Westchester County. Inside was some marijuana, two 38-caliber handguns, \$37,000 in cash, and Black's driver's license.

Durst was returned to Galveston aboard a commercial flight in January 2002. He pleaded guilty two months later to killing Black. He claimed that the older man died accidentally when Durst was defending himself, and he further alleged that Black broke into his apartment and was shot by accident when the two men were fighting over a pistol. He also said that he went to Galveston in November 2000 to escape the heavy media coverage that surrounded the reopened investigation into the disappearance of his first wife. On the other hand,

prosecutors contended that Durst had deliberately killed Black to assume his identity.

After a six-week trial and five days of deliberations, Durst was acquitted in November 2003 of murdering Black. He subsequently pleaded guilty to two counts of jumping bail and one count of tampering with evidence for having dismembered Black's body. He was sentenced to five years in prison, but received credit for time already served. He was released two weeks later. He was imprisoned again in October 2004 on gun charges stemming from the weapons that police found when they searched his red Corsica. He was paroled nine months later, in July 2005.

The mystery surrounding the disappearance and fate of Kathleen Durst remains. But the story inspired books as well as episodes of such television series as *Law & Order*, *America's Most Wanted*, and *Prime Time*. In 2008, a movie was shot whose story was loosely based on Robert Durst. *All Good Things* starred Ryan Gosling and Kirsten Dunst and was directed by Andrew Jarecki.

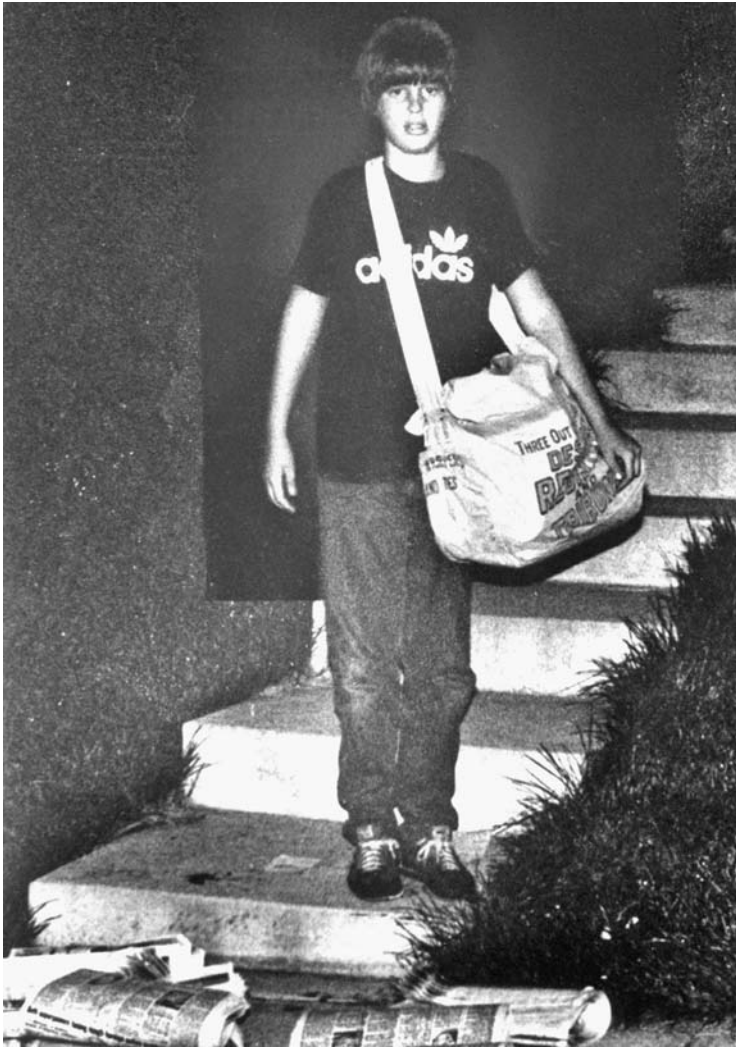
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Johnny Gosch disappeared in 1982 while delivering newspapers in Des Moines, Iowa.  
Taro Yamasaki/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

# Paper Boy: The Disappearance of Johnny Gosch (1982)

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*Police procedures that required them to wait 72 hours before starting an investigation into reports of a missing child were changed as a result of the disappearance of Johnny Gosch. Subsequently, laws were changed to allow police to become involved more quickly in the cases of missing children.*

John and Noreen Gosch were still sleeping when 12-year-old Johnny quietly crept out of their house in West Des Moines, Iowa, at 6 AM on September 5, 1982. He was going out to deliver copies of the Sunday *Des Moines Register* to customers along his paper route. During the week, the junior high school student delivered the newspapers in the afternoon. On Sundays, he had to leave the house before dawn. His father usually accompanied him, but Johnny had complained the night before that he wanted to do the paper route by himself. His parents disagreed. The next morning, Johnny decided not to wake up his father. As he left the house, he grabbed his red wagon to carry the newspapers and Gretchen, the family's dachshund for company. Then he walked down to the street corner where he and other newspaper carriers went to pick up their bundles.

Johnny was about to begin his delivery route when he was stopped by a stocky, middle-aged man with black hair, dark eyes, and a moustache. He was driving a blue, two-door Ford with Iowa license plates. He asked for directions, which the freckle-faced young paperboy provided. However, there was something about the man that made Johnny uncomfortable. The Ford circled again. Johnny decided to take his newspapers and head home. As he walked down the street, another boy heard Gretchen growl. A tall man that the boys had not noticed earlier was walking closely behind Johnny and trying to get his attention. Johnny turned a corner—and disappeared. The boys heard a car door slam. Another boy in a nearby house woke up and looked out the window in time to see a blue car run through a stop sign and speed away.

The phone rang at the Gosches' house just after 7 AM as Johnny's customers began calling. They had not received their newspapers and wanted to know why. His parents went to his bedroom, but there was no sign of their son and the family dog. Clearly, Johnny was out delivering his newspapers. His father John climbed into the car and drove off to help, but all he found was Johnny's red wagon still full of newspapers less than two blocks from their house. He returned home and

broke the news to his wife. “Johnny’s gone,” he told her. Their dog returned home by herself shortly afterwards.

John and Noreen Gosch realized that there was something terribly wrong. Johnny would not just wander off, so they called police at 8:30 AM to report him missing. While they waited for the officers to arrive, Noreen phoned other boys who picked up their newspapers at the same corner as Johnny. That is when she learned that her son had been last seen rounding a corner after talking to a strange man in a blue car.

When the police arrived, the Gosches told them about the witnesses who had seen their son talking to a man just before his disappearance. They provided a description of the car and a partial license-plate number, but the police said that they would not run a motor vehicle check for 72 hours. Despite the information, the officers treated the case as though Johnny was a runaway since he was older than age 10. They asked his parents if he was unhappy at home. His parents were frustrated by the police’s approach to the situation. They knew that Johnny had not run away, and that he had been abducted by a stranger.

The Gosches recruited their friends to help them find Johnny and launched their own search. Volunteers scoured the neighborhood, rivers, and a state park five miles away. There was no sign of Johnny, not even the newspaper bag that he carried for his deliveries. The Des Moines police did not begin a full-scale investigation until three days later. By then, the trail of the two men whom witnesses had seen talking to Johnny had grown cold. A police artist drew a composite sketch of the man that newspaper boys had seen driving the car. It was released to the media, but it did not generate any leads. His family distributed 10,000 posters with his picture on it to media outlets, police, coroners, gas stations, and bus stations around the country.

The family was confident that Johnny was still alive. Every night, Noreen Gosch continued to leave her porch light on. She and her husband appeared on television shows and gave interviews in an effort to generate leads about their son’s disappearance. A photograph of Johnny’s face appeared on milk cartons belonging to the Iowa-based Anderson Erikson Dairy. About a month after the kidnapping, a telephone operator received a call from a young boy who said that he was Johnny Gosch from Des Moines, Iowa, and he was trying to reach his mother. The line went dead and the call was not completed, making it impossible to trace the location from which it originated.

## SIGHTINGS

The family was unhappy with the police investigation. They hired a private detective with the Investigative Research Agency in Chicago a month after Johnny's disappearance. In the ensuing year, they would come to believe that their son's kidnappers had taken him south or southwest of Des Moines. This belief was fueled by what appeared to be sightings of Johnny throughout that area. In March 1983, six months after Johnny vanished, a boy who resembled him approached a woman as she was leaving a store in Oklahoma. "My name is John David Gosch," he reportedly said. "Please help me." Before she had a chance to react, two men came up to him and led him away. When she alerted police, they thought that it was just a father disciplining his son. It was not until October 1983 that she made the connection with Johnny Gosch, when she saw a photo of him while she was watching an NBC television movie about the case of Adam Walsh. Late that summer of 1983, a youth managed to edge up to some customers at a store in the West and said that he was Johnny Gosch, but a man quickly came and led him away.

The family also said that they had received phone calls they believed were from Johnny. Noreen Gosch reported getting calls in April 1983 from a boy who cried "Mom, Mom," and said that he was hurt and trying to get away. The boy's voice sounded like her son's. The calls were made 5 to 10 minutes apart and lasted about 15 to 25 seconds each. In August 1983, his brother and sister were home when the telephone rang. They heard him on the other end pleading for help and asking to speak to his mother. Then someone slammed down the phone.

Johnny's grieving parents were also the victims of hoaxes and extortion attempts. In August 1985, the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested 19-year-old Robert Herman Meier II of Saginaw, Michigan. He had contacted the Gosches and said that he could free their son from the clutches of a Mexican drug dealer if they gave him money. Police caught him at the Canadian border near Buffalo, New York, as he tried to flee into Canada. He was charged with fraud after bilking the Gosches of \$11,000.

By then, a second Des Moines, Iowa, paperboy had disappeared. On August 12, 1984, 13-year-old Eugene Martin left home to deliver copies of the *Des Moines Register* and vanished without a trace. Within days, 18 of the *Des Moines Register's* 1,900 carriers in the metropolitan area quit. The paper announced that if carriers requested it, they would

deliver bundles of newspapers to their homes instead of dropping them off at more central pickup points on street corners.

Unlike the Johnny Gosch case, the FBI became involved immediately, and they looked for similarities between the two disappearances. Both boys had vanished at about dawn on a Sunday morning just as they went to pick up their newspapers at a corner drop-off point in their residential neighborhoods. They were both seen talking to a man just before they vanished. The two drop-offs were located about eight miles apart. The FBI found no trace of Martin nor could they establish a link between the two disappearances despite some similarities.

In July 1985, nearly three years after Johnny had disappeared, his parents continued to keep their son's story in the public eye. John and Noreen Gosch held a news conference and offered a \$400,000 reward to kidnappers in exchange for his release. They promised not to support criminal charges against his abductors. The Gosches said that they were disappointed with the police investigation and believed that they possessed evidence that their son was kidnapped.

Besides providing information about repeated alleged sightings and phone calls, Johnny's parents displayed a dollar bill with the words, "I am alive. Johnny Gosch," written on it in cursive writing. A Sioux City, Iowa, woman said that she had received the money as change when she made a purchase at a supermarket in June. The dollar bill was traced back to the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis, where it was released on July 25, 1984.

Three handwriting experts compared the note to something that Johnny had written before he was kidnapped. They concluded that the writing was his. Appealing to his kidnappers, his parents said, "Contact us privately to negotiate for our son's return alive and unharmed. We will be willing to meet your demands and we will in turn also discontinue our private investigation. We will in no way attempt to discover your identity and if the authorities wish to pursue the matter we will not involve ourselves in any type of legal resolution."

These efforts led the family no closer to finding their son, but they did not give up. The Gosches left their son's bedroom just as it was the morning that he disappeared. In 1990, John Gosch received a phone call from lawyer John DeCamp in Omaha, Nebraska, with what appeared to be a fresh lead. The lawyer said that one of his clients who was in jail claimed that he had abducted Johnny Gosch. A skeptical John Gosch hired private investigator Roy Stephens to talk to 24-year-old Paul Bonacci, who was in prison for sexually assaulting three boys.

When the Gosches later met Bonacci, they came away convinced that he was telling them the truth. He said that a ring of pedophiles forced him into prostitution at the age of eight and later used him as a decoy in the abduction of other young boys. He told them that he and another man had kidnapped Johnny as part of an organized pedophile ring. One man pushed the boy into the backseat of the Ford Fairmont, and Bonacci used chloroform to make him lose consciousness. Gosch was taken to a house in Sioux City, Iowa, and subsequently sold to a pedophile who lived on a ranch in Colorado. Bonacci last saw Johnny there in 1989 before he was sent to a European country, renamed Mark, and had his hair dyed black.

The Gosches were convinced about Bonacci's story because he provided details about their son that were not common knowledge. He told Noreen Gosch that Johnny had a stutter and had once taken yoga. These were details that had not been released to the media. She and her husband brought the information about Bonacci to police hoping that they would interview him and other men that they believed were involved in their son's abduction. However, the West Des Moines police were skeptical about the confession, in part because Bonacci has multiple personalities; only one personality claims to have been involved in the abduction. He had also been charged with perjury after testifying that well-known Omaha citizens were involved in pedophilia. Police believed that he would therefore make a poor witness if the case were solved and went to trial.

In 1992, the Gosch case was featured on the television show *America's Most Wanted*. The airing generated hundreds of new leads but all turned into dead ends. Noreen Gosch claimed that her son paid her a visit at her apartment in March 1997 for an hour. She said that he told her he could not come home because he was involved in criminal activities.

On August 27, 2006, two photos were left on Noreen Gosch's doorstep. One showed a young boy bound and gagged. The other photo was of three boys bound and gagged and lying side by side on a bed. She was certain that the images were of her son, but police analysis revealed that this was not the case. Retired detective Nelson Zalva from the Hillsborough County Sheriff's office in Tampa, Florida, said that the photos were evidence in a case that he had investigated in the late 1970s—before Johnny Gosch was abducted. All the boys in the photo were identified, and none were Johnny Gosch.

## LOBBYING FOR CHANGES

The case has not been solved and theories about Johnny Gosch's fate abound. However, the family lobbied successfully for changes in how child abductions are investigated. In 1984, the Iowa State Legislature passed a bill that allowed police to respond quickly when receiving reports of missing children instead of waiting 72 hours. Police in Iowa and many other states start searching for a missing child immediately. The nonprofit National Center for Missing and Exploited Children was set up in 1984 as an information clearinghouse. It works to prevent child abductions and sexual exploitation, helps find missing children, and offers support to victims and their families.

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# **Fishing for a Killer: The Murder of Matthew Margolies (1984)**

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*Fear gripped the community of Greenwich, Connecticut, in the immediate aftermath of the murder of Matthew Margolies. Stung by the criticism leveled against them in another unsolved murder nine years earlier, police carefully gathered forensic evidence at the Margolies murder scene. However, they had failed to follow up on a lead about his possible whereabouts until five days later—and that may have led to crucial evidence being washed away.*

Thirteen-year-old Matthew Margolies adored his grandfather. After Matthew's parents divorced in 1984, the two would go fishing together nearly every day at the Byram River or Parkway Lake in Greenwich, Connecticut. Matthew even called his grandfather "Dad" and wanted to be a firefighter just like him. They were inseparable. Matthew did not have much contact with his own father, Paul, a corporate executive living in Texas.

Matthew and his older sister, 19-year-old Stacey, lived with their mother in a white, two-story clapboard house on Pilgrim Drive in a modest neighborhood. The house sat on a hill overlooking the Byram River. Their mother, Maryann, was a nurse, and Matthew often stayed with her parents, Stella and George Miazga, who lived a few blocks away on Morgan Avenue. He even planted tomatoes and corn in their garden. When George Miazga was diagnosed with a terminal illness in the summer of 1984, a devastated but attentive Matthew made sure that his grandfather took his medication and ate and drank properly. Miazga died on August 17. To help him through his grief, Stella gave him her husband's fishing rod and the rest of his gear.

Two weeks later, the quiet, dark-haired boy was sleeping over at his grandmother's house when Maryann phoned to say goodnight. "I love you," she said. It would be her last words to him. August 31, 1984, was the beginning of the final weekend before eighth grade began, and Matthew decided to indulge in his passion that Labor Day weekend. He laced up his black-and-white checkered sneakers, grabbed his rod and fishing tackle, and headed toward the Byram River.

On his way, Matthew stopped into a deli in the neighborhood to buy some milk and a Danish on which to snack. Then he went down to the river for the morning. Just before noon, he returned to his grandmother's house and placed his catch—a large trout—in her kitchen sink. He took off his soaking wet corduroy pants and draped them over a chair in the living room to dry. He changed into a pair of shorts and left again. Stella returned home at noon, but her grandson was already gone. He was still

out when she left the house at about 4 PM to run errands before dinner. A neighbor saw Matthew at about 5 PM. He was walking towards the Byram River with his fishing pole. He was last seen fishing from the Comley Avenue bridge near the deli. It was one of his favorite places to fish, and other boys were with him.

Stella Miazga and Maryann Margolies began to worry when Matthew didn't come home for dinner that night. It was unusual for him because he would always let them know where he was. Maryann drove around the neighborhood looking for him. At 7 PM she contacted police to report that her 13-year-old son was missing. Officers arrived at her house to gather information, but they were not terribly concerned. Matthew was devastated about his grandfather's recent death and was probably hiding somewhere, they speculated. Maryann pointed out that he always phoned if he planned to be late, and left notes whenever he went out. It was not like him to just disappear.

## DISAPPEARANCE AND SEARCH

The police suggested that Maryann Margolies search by the river with her son's dog Freckles, shouting, "It's okay Matthew. You're not in trouble. Just come out and show me where you are." She knew that it was pointless, but she did it anyway out of desperation. They told her to call them again if he still had not turned up. Later that night, detectives began to take Matthew's disappearance more seriously and launched a search. Police and volunteers scoured a three-mile stretch of river extensively, but turned up no sign of him. Divers went into the river to see if he had drowned, and helicopters flew overhead hoping to spot a hint of his whereabouts. Two days later, police called in the Federal Bureau of Investigation for help.

The extensive search dragged on, led by officers in the youth division rather than detectives with experience conducting murder investigations. On September 5, five days after Matthew disappeared, volunteer searcher Fred Lambert found a pair of black-and-white checkered sneakers on an isolated ridge near the top of a heavily wooded ravine at about 3 PM. Matthew had asked his mother about that very spot when they were driving by a week earlier. It was where mill workers once lived, she had explained. She also told him not to go there by himself.

Maryann Margolies told police about the spot when she contacted them about Matthew's disappearance, but much time would pass

before anyone checked it out for signs of her son. It was located more than a mile from his home. Lambert picked up one of the sneakers and brought it to show police. Two officers immediately accompanied him back to the spot where he had found it. An hour later, they discovered the decomposing body of a teenage boy buried nearby in a shallow and hastily dug grave. It was covered with leaves and rocks.

They were almost certain that it was Matthew Margolies. He was wearing a white t-shirt and underwear. His athletic shorts were lying near his body, but there was no sign of sexual assault. He had died of multiple stab wounds to the neck, chest, and abdomen and what state deputy chief medical examiner Dr. H. Wayne Carver II called “traumatic asphyxia.” He had suffocated to death during this brutal attack after his killer had stuffed sticks and dirt in his throat while he was still alive. But it was clear from cuts on Matthew’s arms that he had tried to fight off his attacker.

Fear spread throughout the community. Parents began picking up their children from school—even the older ones—and would not let them go outside alone. They would also keep a wary eye out for strangers wandering their streets. At Western Junior High School, teachers set up a buddy system. Students were paired up and instructed to phone their buddy in the morning if they were not coming to school. To ensure their safety, school officials planned to call the homes of any students who had not arrived and were not accounted for. Otherwise, if kids disappeared between home and school, parents might not know until the evening. Teachers also discussed with students precautions about dealing with strangers.

The murder reminded residents of the then-unsolved murder of 15-year-old Martha Moxley. On October 31, 1975, her badly beaten body was found near her home in the Belle Haven section of Greenwich. She had been beaten to death with a golf club. The police department was criticized for its investigation of the case. It would take more than 25 years for her killer to be found. In 2002, neighbor Michael Skakel, a member of the Kennedy clan, was convicted of her murder and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Still stinging from the criticism of the way they handled the Moxley case, the Greenwich Police Department was careful about the way that they collected and looked after the evidence at the Margolies crime scene. The slope where his body was found was sealed off, and the scene was photographed from different angles. They searched the area for evidence, and then they began removing the leaves, branches, and rocks

that covered the shallow grave. Some rocks were as much as three feet long and weighed more than 100 pounds. Matthew's body was carefully lifted out of the shallow grave and taken to the morgue. After his remains were removed, officers found the murder weapon that had been left behind. It was a 10-and-a-half-inch boning knife.

Despite the careful work of police officers, they could find no clues pointing to Matthew's killer, no witnesses, and no obvious motive. The hot and rainy weather had affected the crime scene by the time it was finally located. Although Matthew's shorts had been removed, he had not been molested, but the brutality of his murder led investigators to theorize that he had been humiliated and tortured and that that had been the goal of his killer. A woman who lived in the area told detectives that she had heard someone screaming at around 6 PM the night that Matthew went missing.

## **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

Ten detectives worked on the case, interviewing more than 1,000 people for possible leads. FBI profiler John Douglas said that the killer was likely a white male who lived nearby, knew Matthew, and was aware that he went fishing almost every day. Police now had the murder weapon and other evidence from the crime scene as well as clues regarding the type of suspect they were looking for. Police interviewed potential suspects, including local sex offenders, a teenage bully who lived near the crime scene, and a boy who claimed that he had bought Matthew's fishing rod from him for \$2. Police spent three hours interviewing the bully, who had had encounters with Matthew. Investigators learned nothing new, and they did not find anything in a search of his home. The time card from the restaurant where he worked indicated that he had been on shift from 4 PM to 10:40 PM—the time during which Matthew Margolies had been murdered. There was nothing linking him to the crime.

A few weeks after the murder, a maintenance worker at Grand Central Terminal in New York found a suitcase full of newspaper clippings about Matthew's murder. The police wondered if it was the killer's souvenir of the murder that he had committed, but investigators traced the suitcase's owner to Matthew's neighborhood. The man was a commuter, and his wife had collected the articles as reference material for a safety project that she was working on as a school volunteer. Nine months after the murder, the investigation was down to three detectives and no new leads.

In 2000, the Connecticut State Police's cold case squad took over the investigation. They had helped solve the decades-old 1975 murder of Martha Moxley. Biological materials from the Margolies crime scene had been carefully preserved, in an era before DNA evidence was used to help solve crimes. Connecticut governor John G. Rowland increased the reward for information leading to an arrest in the case to \$50,000.

The result of a DNA test that was conducted on a possible suspect was negative. Investigators also followed up on the possibility that former Port Chester police officer Roger Kenneth Bates may have been involved in Matthew's murder. He was a detective in Greenwich from 1975 to 1985, and he was later convicted of molesting a 14-year-old boy in Texas. One of Matthew's childhood friends said that Bates had molested him in 1984, and the man had also once taken the two boys fishing in 1984. A strong connection could not be established, however, and a request in 2006 for a grand jury to indict Bates failed.

A plaque in Matthew's memory was placed beside one of his favorite fishing spots on the Byram River. It reads:

*“Matthew Margolies  
An Excellent Angler,  
And Now With God  
1971–1984”*

Although Maryann Margolies has since remarried, she chose to keep the family name that she shared with her son. It is a constant reminder to people in her community that Matthew's killer is still at large.

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# Dog Breeder: The Case of Camilla Lyman (1987)

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*The reclusiveness of victim Camilla Lyman and the fact that her disappearance was not reported for more than five months may have made it more difficult for police to track down her killer.*

Camilla Lyman was a recluse who had one passion in life from the time that she was a teenager, and that is that she wanted to show dogs in competitions. She was the daughter of wealthy New Englanders Arthur T. Lyman and Margaret Rice Lyman. Her father had worked for the State of Massachusetts for more than 30 years, including stints as commissioner of corrections and commissioner of conservation, and she inherited a part of her parents' fortune when they passed away. The death of her father from lung cancer in 1968 hit her especially hard, as they had been close. Afterwards, she began pulling away from her family, which included two sisters and a brother, and became distant from relatives. She had only a small circle of trusted friends. The one constant in her life were the 58 champion spaniels that she bred.

A few years after Lyman's father passed away, she began to display a desire to become a man. She cut her hair short and adopted the more masculine sounding name "Cam." She was nearly six feet tall and began dressing like a man. She also grew a narrow moustache using steroids that were actually intended for her dogs. She attended dog shows wearing bolo ties and tweed jackets, and her short haircut, moustache, and attire made her look strikingly like her father.

In the late 1970s, she met tax accountant George T. O'Neil and his wife at a dog show. They owned the Wicksfords Kennel and invited her to have a cup of tea in their motor home. From there, the friendship grew. Lyman liked to carry large amounts of cash on her—even if she were only going to the grocery store to buy milk. In 1984 she was living in her hometown, the Boston suburb of Westwood, Massachusetts, when someone broke into her house. The reclusive Lyman was terrified. She phoned O'Neil, her closest friend, and screamed that she wanted to move. With his help, she bought an 11-room Victorian house that sat on 40 acres of land on Collins Road in Hopkinton, Rhode Island, not far from the Connecticut border. She apparently paid about \$500,000 to add a kennel with 20 runs for her dogs.

The socially awkward Lyman was a recluse who delegated to others the task of dealing with the practical matters in her life. Having others look after the mundane details of her life freed up her time to look after and show her champion spaniels. In 1984, she gave O'Neil a power of attorney to handle her finances, including her bank accounts and her

debts. He also made her travel arrangements and picked up the mail. One day in Springfield, Massachusetts, for example, she gave O'Neil an envelope and told him to look after the contents. When he opened it, he discovered \$330,000 worth of stock certificates.

She drafted a will on October 31, 1984, leaving O'Neil her Hopkinton estate, land in Nova Scotia, and her entire \$2.1 million in trust funds. In exchange, he was to look after her 58 show dogs. He was also to make a "suitable" donation to the Dog Museum of America in the name of a champion show dog that she had owned in the 1950s called Ricefields Jon. She also requested that she be cremated. An airplane was to spread her ashes over Madison Square Garden during the Westminster Kennel Club's annual dog show.

According to O'Neil, Lyman had a temper, particularly when one of her dogs did not do well in competition. In fact, he was the last person to talk to Lyman on July 18, 1987. She desperately wanted to attend a dog show in New Brunswick, Canada, but O'Neil wasn't able to register her because of a postal strike there. He phoned her to tell her what had happened. She was livid. Suddenly, the line went dead. O'Neil called back several times but there was no answer.

## DISAPPEARANCE

On July 19, O'Neil drove out to her 40-acre estate to see her. Her car and motor home were still in the driveway. Some of the 58 dogs were inside the kennel while others were outside. There was no sign of Lyman, and it was evident that some of her beloved canines had not been fed. Inside the house, the telephone was ripped out of the wall. Her attaché case stuffed with jewelry, clothes, and \$200,000 in cash that she kept at home were gone.

Lyman, 54, had vanished, but O'Neil decided not to alert the police. She had once disappeared for six months when she lived in Westwood, and he reasoned that perhaps she had voluntarily gone away once more and would return soon. O'Neil used money from her bank accounts to look after her home, dogs, and kennel. Some of her canines were given to other kennels in the New England area on condition that they would be returned if Lyman reappeared. He kept two of her retired spaniels at his home.

For months after Lyman's July 1987 disappearance, O'Neil and his wife would receive telephone calls during which the caller did not speak. They assumed that the caller was Lyman, so they talked about



which dogs were winning competitions and how they were doing. The caller would hang up once O'Neil and his wife had finished speaking. Then the calls stopped as mysteriously as they began.

It was not until Christmastime that anyone else noticed the recluse's absence. Lyman's sisters began to worry after an elderly friend of the family noted that Camilla had not sent her a Christmas card as she usually did. Mary Margaret Goodale wrote her sister Camilla a letter to see if she was fine, but there was no response. She and her other sister contacted the administrators of Camilla's trust and inquired about her whereabouts. Again, they received no reply.

In August 1988, the family hired private investigator Charles John Allen, president of Management Consultants, of Lexington, Massachusetts. O'Neil told him that Lyman had gone to Europe to have a sex-change operation. Allen had his contacts in Europe check out the tightly knit European transvestite scene for someone who fit Lyman's description and who had undergone an operation, but there was no sign of the recluse. He checked records in 50 states and Canada, to no avail. Lyman's brother, Arthur, filed a missing person report in December 1988, but the Hopkinton police chief George Weeden saw no reason to investigate. O'Neil claimed that Lyman often disappeared for long stretches at a time without telling anyone. The police concluded that no crime had been committed, since there was no body.

Lyman's sisters weren't so sure, however. Why would their sister leave her beloved dogs unattended for so long? Allen continued to search for clues as to Lyman's whereabouts. In 1989, he discovered that hunters had found a body in a ditch in Chester County, Pennsylvania, on October 31, 1987, three months after Lyman had gone missing. The decomposed corpse was that of a muscular woman who was about six feet tall and who wore men's clothing. It sounded like it could be the missing dog breeder. Allen requested Lyman's dental records to compare with those of the corpse, but there were none. The recluse had been too afraid to see a dentist. Allen showed her siblings an artist's composite sketch of the dead woman's face, but they could not say with any certainty that it was their sister. Authorities in Pennsylvania finally buried the body.

After searching for clues for six years, Allen had spent 1,500 hours on the case and the family had paid him \$33,000 in fees. He finally concluded that Lyman was dead—and had been since the day that she disappeared. His firm had managed to find all of the 8,000 people it had been hired to locate over the years—except Lyman. This was the

first time that his detective agency had been stumped on a missing person case.

In 1994, Lyman's siblings had come to the same conclusion as Allen. Sisters Mary Margaret Goodale and Edith F. Kuhn filed a petition in Hopkinton Probate Court requesting that Judge Linda Urso declare Lyman dead. They also asked that her family be the ones to inherit her trust fund rather than have it be given to O'Neil, whom Lyman had named as the sole beneficiary in her will. According to Rhode Island law, a judge could declare a person dead if they had disappeared from their home and their whereabouts are unknown for more than four years. By then, it had been seven years since anyone had seen or spoken to Lyman.

## LEGALLY DEAD

Camilla Lyman was declared legally dead in June 1995, just short of eight years after she disappeared. The judge ruled that her family could keep the \$2-million trust fund and O'Neil would be awarded her property. He did not receive any portion of the trust fund. However, the judge ruled that her inheritance had to be returned to her if she ever turned up alive.

John Scuncio, a retired state police detective, took over as Hopkinton police chief in 1996 and decided to take another look at the case. For the first time since Lyman had disappeared nine years earlier, police conducted an official search of the 40-acre property. By then, George O'Neil had sold the Hopkinson estate to Greg Siner and Gardner Young.

Siner was walking in the woods on the sprawling property one autumn morning in September 1997 when he detected a strong odor coming from the septic tank. Thinking that perhaps it needed to be pumped, he pried off the cement cover. To his horror, he came face to face with a skeleton. "I looked in and there was a skull staring up at me," he recounted in a newspaper interview. He raced back to his Victorian house, where Young called police.

Scuncio came over to have a look. He worked with the Federal Bureau of Investigation laboratory's Special Projects Section in Washington, D.C., to determine whether the skeleton belonged to Lyman. In October 1998, police confirmed that the remains were, indeed, those of the transvestite millionaire. The FBI relied on dental comparisons, computer-aided skull imagery, Lyman's personal effects, and the expertise of anthropologists to help identify the bones. Lyman was cremated and finally put to rest in her hometown more than 11 years after she disappeared.

Rhode Island's chief medical examiner, Dr. Elizabeth Laposata, confirmed that Lyman had been murdered—but by whom, and how? Detectives continued their search for clues. In 1999, the case was featured on the popular television show *Unsolved Mysteries*. It generated no tips that could help police get one step closer to finding Lyman's killer.

During the course of Allen's search for Lyman, he had looked at her bank accounts and discovered that large sums of money were missing. He handed the file over to the police. O'Neil and lawyer Robert A. Ragosta were responsible for managing Lyman's money. As part of a settlement in April 1999, the two men admitted to the U.S. District Court that they had not respected Lyman's wishes when they used her trust fund to finance real estate deals. They agreed to give the American Kennel Club Museum of the Dog the trust's remaining \$235,000 and pay \$900,000 in compensatory damages plus interest.

In 2002, O'Neil was indicted for embezzling \$15,000 from Lyman's estate. He was charged for cashing a check in her name on March 13, 1992. A year later, he admitted in Superior Court that he could have been found guilty if he had been brought to trial. He was sentenced to a year's probation and charged \$450 in court costs.

The mystery of Lyman's disappearance and that of her money were solved, but more than 20 years after that July day when her phone was ripped from the wall police still have no idea who killed her or why. It is one mystery that may never be solved.

## FURTHER READING

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Glenda Whitson holds a picture of her nine-year-old granddaughter, Amber Hagerman, and flyers asking for information about the whereabouts of the missing child. AP Photo/Bill Janscha.

# Amber Alert: The Murder of Amber Hagerman (1996)

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*The kidnapping and murder of Amber Hagerman led to the Amber Alert system, in which police use broadcasters to quickly alert the public about child kidnappings and solicit their help to find the victims. Amber Alerts began in Texas but are now used in countries around the world.*

Nine-year-old Amber Hagerman liked vanilla ice cream, skating, and Barbie dolls. She also loved to rake leaves into piles and jump in them. The third-grader at Berry Elementary School in Arlington, Texas, was a good student, and writing was her favorite subject. She had helped teach her younger brother Ricky how to read. The girl with freckles on her face and a gap-toothed smile was independent. Amber had a favorite tree branch in her grandparents' yard that she would refuse to climb down from when she did not want to leave Grandma and Grandpa's house.

Amber, Ricky, and their mother, Donna Whitson, left their apartment complex in east Arlington on January 13, 1996. It was warm, and they went to a park before heading to Burger King for a bite to eat. Then they walked door-to-door selling Girl Scout cookies to relatives and friends. Afterwards, they stopped in for a visit at the home of Amber's grandparents, Glenda and Jim Whitson. The close-knit neighborhood around the house on Highland Drive where Donna grew up had always been safe.

That January day, Amber was wearing a light pink shirt with a hand-print design on it. Her hair was tied with a black-and-white ribbon. She was singing *America the Beautiful* as she climbed onto her pink bicycle at about 3 PM and pedaled out of her grandparents' driveway with five-year-old Ricky. They went about a block away, to the parking lot of an abandoned Winn-Dixie grocery store on East Abram Street.

Children in the neighborhood liked to ride their bikes up and down the loading ramp on the store's east side. Ricky returned home alone a few minutes later. Neighbor Jimmie Kevil was in the backyard of his home on Ruth Street when he heard a girl scream. A full-sized black pickup truck pulled up to where Amber was riding her bike in the empty parking lot by herself, about eight minutes after she had left home. A man jumped out, grabbed her under the arm, and pulled her off her bicycle. The bike fell over, and the man forced the kicking and screaming Amber into the cab of his truck and sped off. She had been abducted from a main thoroughfare in broad daylight, near a busy laundromat, and in full view of the yards of nearly a half-dozen neighbors. Kevil was the only witness, however. He called police.

When Amber did not return home, her grandfather Jim Whitson became worried, and he went to look for her. He found her bike lying on its side, but there was no sign of Amber. Kevil told him that Amber had been abducted. Jim returned home and broke the news to his family. "Somebody's got her. Somebody's got Amber," another neighbor heard Amber's aunt Sandra scream.

Richard Hagerman, Amber's father, had been working on an old car when he went to the Whitsons to see his children. He was unaware that his daughter had been kidnapped. As he arrived, he saw police cars and thought that something had happened at a neighbor's house across the street. "Then I saw Donna crying in the driveway, and I knew it was something else," he later said in a newspaper interview.

## SEARCH

Police searched the area, but they only found Amber's bicycle. They notified the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other North Texas law enforcement agencies about the girl's disappearance. Local and national news reporters, photographers, and satellite trucks began gathering outside the family's home. Police and FBI agents conducted door-to-door searches and checked known sex offenders and the owners of black pickup trucks. Some civilians formed search parties to look for Amber, but there was no trace of her.

As the search dragged on, Whitson and Hagerman stepped outside of the house and made a brief emotional plea, begging the kidnapper to release Amber unharmed. "Please don't hurt my baby, she's just an innocent child," a distraught Whitson said. "Please, please bring her home safe. Please." They also pleaded with anyone who had information about the abduction to call police. For more than four days, the family held vigil as they waited for news. "Nobody slept. Nobody ate," Whitson remembered. "Every time the phone rang, we jumped."

Four days later, a man was walking his dog at about 11 PM when he spotted the body of a young girl. She was lying facedown in a creek bed behind the Forest Ridge apartment complex. She was nude, except for a sock on her right foot. In the wee hours of Thursday, January 18, the body was confirmed to be Amber's. The Tarrant County Medical Examiner ruled that she had been sexually assaulted and that she died after having her throat slashed. She had been found about four miles from the parking lot where she was abducted. Police officers and a chaplain arrived at the Whitson home to break the news to the family.

Two days later, 2,000 friends, relatives, classmates, and strangers filed past Amber's blue casket as she lay dressed in pink, her favorite color. Her parents, Richard Hagerman and Donna Whitson, lay a rose on their daughter's casket. The funeral service began at 2 PM inside First United Methodist Church. Her teachers and city and school officials filled two pews, and about a dozen of Amber's classmates sat in the balcony and stared down at her casket for most of the service. Mourners stood and wept as they sang her favorite song, *America the Beautiful*, from the church hymnal. Hundreds of people made a pilgrimage to the parking lot where Amber was last seen alive and left teddy bears, flowers, and letters at a makeshift memorial.

## POLICE INVESTIGATION

Thirty police officers and FBI agents worked on the investigation around the clock, stopping only to take brief naps. A recent rainfall made it difficult to collect forensic evidence from the creek where Amber's body was found. They reviewed videotape from surveillance cameras at the Forest Ridge apartment complex hoping to turn up clues about her killer.

On January 30, 1996, police revealed that the kidnapper had kept Amber alive for 48 hours before dumping her body. They believed the Forest Ridge Apartments in northeast Arlington was located in an area that he knew well. The crime, they said, likely coincided with a stressful event in the killer's life. "This could be an argument with a friend, a relative, a domestic situation or possibly the loss of a job," Sergeant Mike Simonds told reporters at the time. He was heading a 10-member task force investigating Amber's abduction and slaying. According to the FBI's psychological profile, Amber's killer lived or worked near the spot where he dumped her body. He was at least 25 years old and lived alone or was alone when he kidnapped her and held her captive.

Amber's autopsy did not provide police with any clues that could lead them to her killer's identity. Water in the creek where she was found may have destroyed some of the evidence, but they did find traces of fiber on her body that could help detectives make a connection if they found a suspect. The Tarrant County medical examiner's office said that Amber was not raped, but she did have injuries that suggested she might have been molested. Her throat had been slashed five times and she died quickly.

In mid-March 1996, five FBI agents who were assigned to Amber's case were removed from the day-to-day investigation. The federal agency continued to share its expertise in forensic laboratory examination and

followed up on out-of-state leads. The Arlington Police Department created the Amber Hagerman Task Force to continue investigating the thousands of leads into her abduction and murder. Twelve handpicked investigators were assigned to the squad, headed by Sergeant Mark Simpson. They focused their efforts on the Forest Ridge Apartments, one of the largest complexes in Arlington. Every person who lived or worked there was interviewed.

Detectives hosted a half-day intelligence meeting on the case in early April. It brought together about 100 local, state, and federal investigators from across Texas with expertise in child abductions and homicide. They reviewed the details of the case, looked for similarities between it and other offenses, and offered suggestions of new avenues of investigation for detectives to pursue.

In an effort to draw out her daughter's killer, Donna Whitson held a news conference on April 8, 1996, and read an open letter to him: "My little girl did nothing to you. Why did you terrify her?" she asked, according to newspapers. "Why did you take her clothing from her? Why did you touch her where you were not supposed to? Why did you hurt her and most of all why did you kill her?" Then she waited, hoping that he would send a reply to a post office box she had set up for that purpose. Week after week, letters of sympathy and support arrived—but no news from her daughter's killer.

On May 14, 1996, Whitson released a second letter to the murderer. She was looking for answers. "I have never known an emotion could run deeper than love and then you brought hatred to my life," she said in the second letter. "I feel a rage, a fury, that burns in my soul." She hoped to persuade the killer to write to her, by including in the letter, "You have committed the perfect crime. What fear could you have of capture? After all there is no evidence, no witnesses. . . ." There was still no response.

For their part, police investigators spent days combing the area where Amber was kidnapped. They distributed new reward posters that included more information on the characteristics of the killer. They also publicized a \$75,000 reward for information leading to the murderer's arrest and conviction. There was no sketch of the suspect. All that police knew was that he looked Anglo or Hispanic and drove a black late-model pickup truck, possibly a Ford. No new clues turned up.

Police investigated thousands of leads, which included contacting former kidnappers and sex offenders who were known to be living in the Arlington-Dallas-Fort Worth area, but what appeared to be promising leads went nowhere. In November 1996, investigators went to



Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to question a man who had been arrested in connection with raping and strangling two girls. Howard Steven Ault lived in Arlington until 1994 and had family ties to the area, but he was able to provide an alibi for the day that Amber was abducted. He was not connected to her case.

In April 1997, investigators traveled to Friendswood, Texas, outside Houston, to compare notes on the slaying of Laura Kate Smither. The 12-year-old disappeared on April 3, 1997, while going for a jog near her home. Her body was found about 10 miles northeast of Friendswood 17 days later, on April 20. She and Amber were both found in water, naked except for one sock. They were each white and had long brown hair and freckles. Amber's throat had been cut while Laura was decapitated, but police believed that it could have been caused by decomposition, animals, or water flow. However, investigators found no connection between the two murders.

Police chased down about 6,000 leads, including more than a dozen false confessions. They spent more than \$1.1 million in an effort to catch Amber's killer, but after a year and a half of searching the number of leads had dwindled to 15. On June 23, 1997, Arlington police announced that they were disbanding the Amber Hagerman task force. There was no longer a need for a task force of five full-time members, although they would continue to investigate the case.

In August 1999, registered sex offender Richard Lee Franks of Fort Worth, Texas, was charged with abducting and sexually assaulting Opal Jo Jennings, a six-year-old girl from Saginaw, Texas, who was snatched from her grandmother's yard in March 1999. Arlington police met with Saginaw authorities, but they determined that there was no connection between the two cases.

Ten years after Amber was murdered, police thought they might have yet another lead. In July 2007, police in Seattle arrested Terapon Adhahn for the kidnapping and murder of 12-year-old Zina Linnik. She disappeared from a July 4 celebration, and her body was found July 12 in Washington State. Adhahn was charged with first-degree kidnapping and first-degree rape and murder. Arlington police investigated a possible connection with Amber's killing, but found none.

## LEGACY

Three months after Amber was abducted, the makeshift memorial that had sprung up in the vacant grocery store parking lot where she was

kidnapped was removed. It included flowers, pink bows, handwritten notes, and teddy bears. Two strangers had planted a three-foot-tall tree nearby in her memory, but the outpouring of emotion that followed the murder led to initiatives to protect children. Within days of Amber's funeral, her parents announced plans to lobby for tougher laws for sex offenders. This initiative led to the creation of the group People Against Sex Offenders, which acted as a clearinghouse for information about the crime and lobbied for stronger laws to protect the public from molesters and rapists.

At the end of March 1996, Democratic congressman Martin Frost introduced the federal Amber Hagerman Child Protection Act to the U.S. House of Representatives. It increased the prison sentence of violent sex offenders and mandated an automatic life sentence in prison for anyone who was twice convicted of a sex offense against a child. It also created a nationwide sex offender registry. President Bill Clinton signed the Amber Hagerman Child Protection Act into law in October 1996.

The same month that the act was signed into law, police and radio station executives in the Arlington area unveiled the Amber Plan (now known as an Amber Alert). Believed to be the first joint effort between media outlets and police departments, it calls for the emergency broadcast of a confirmed child abduction to alert the public and enlist their assistance in locating the child. Radio and television stations broadcast descriptions of abducted children and suspects, and information is also posted on electronic highway signs.

Two years later, in November 1998, Arlington police issued an alert about babysitter Sandra Joyce Fallis's abduction of eight-week-old Rae-Leigh Bradbury. A driver spotted Fallis's truck about 90 minutes after the alert was issued, and the child was safely returned. It was the first Amber Alert to lead to the prosecution of a suspect. In 2002, Texas governor Rick Perry extended the Amber Alert across Texas. In 2005, Hawaii became the last U.S. state to adopt the program.

A year later, in 2006, President George W. Bush signed a law expanding the Amber Alert program nationwide by giving states funding to start alert programs and authorizing the creation of guidelines as to when Amber Alerts should be issued. The law also allows federal judges to deny pretrial release for people charged with child rape or abduction, to order the lifetime supervision of sex offenders, to mandate life sentences for two-time child-sex offenders, and to toughen child-pornography laws.

The Amber Alert program has since been extended to other countries, including Canada, Australia, Britain, Greece, Netherlands, Belgium,

and France. In 2005, the United Postal Service created an Amber Alert stamp to commemorate and honor the program. In its first 10 years, the Amber Alert led to 400 children being successfully located and reunited with their families.

More than 10 years after Amber Hagerman was yanked off her bicycle and stuffed into the cab of a black pickup truck, her abduction and murder remains unsolved. Her mother, Donna Whitson (now Donna Norris), gives speeches around the United States on child safety and the Amber Alert system. The case is still open, consigned to the cold case unit. Detective Jim Ford was the lead investigator on the case and the only one left trying to find Amber's killer. According to an article in the *Dallas Morning-News*, he kept a picture of her in his cubicle and would visit the site of the kidnapping and Amber's grave. "Everybody went all out, trying to help," Ford said. "There were lots of volunteers and various businesses put up reward money. We all really wanted to solve this one."

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Information about the unsolved murder of tiny beauty queen JonBenet Ramsey filled dozens of binders.  
Ray Ng/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

# Child Beauty Queen: The Murder of JonBenet Ramsey (1996)

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*The investigation into the murder of JonBenet Ramsey was marred from the outset by such police errors as allowing Ramsey family and friends to contaminate the crime scene before securing the area, allowing father John Ramsey to search the house unaccompanied by police, and letting family members remove items from the home before the investigation was completed. This case highlights the need for proper crime scene management.*

John and Patricia Ramsey returned from a Christmas party on December 25, 1996, to their 15-room Tudor-style mansion in Boulder, Colorado. This college town of 96,000 is located in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains about 30 miles northwest of Denver. John, 53, was president of Access Graphics, a \$1-billion subsidiary of Lockheed Aeronautics. Beauty queen Patsy Ramsey, 39, was a former Miss West Virginia.

The couple put their two young children to bed, nine-year-old Burke and six-year-old JonBenet. The kindergarten student was a tiny beauty pageant queen who was named Little Miss Colorado 1995 and America's Tiny Little Miss 1996. John Ramsey's children from his previous marriage, John Andrew Ramsey, 20, and Melinda Ramsey, 25, lived with their mother, Lucinda Johnson.

Once the house was quiet, the Ramseys went to sleep. The next morning, on December 26, 1996, Patsy Ramsey phoned police at 5:52 AM. The grief-stricken mother said that JonBenet had been kidnapped and she found a ransom note on one of the mansion's two staircases. The ransom note read:

*Mr. Ramsey:*

*Listen carefully! We are a group of individuals that represent a small foreign faction. We respect your business but not the country that it serves. At this time we have your daughter in our possession. She is safe and unharmed and if you want her to see 1997, you must follow our instructions to the letter.*

*You will withdraw \$118,000 from your account. \$100,000 will be in \$100 bills, and the remaining \$18,000 in \$20 bills. Make sure that you bring an adequate size attaché to the bank. When you get home you will put the money in a brown paper bag. I will call you between 8 and 10 am tomorrow to instruct you on delivery. The delivery will be exhausting so I advise you to be rested. If we monitor you getting the money early, we might call you early*

*to arrange an earlier delivery of the money and hence a(n) earlier ~~delivery~~ pick up of your daughter.*

*Any deviation of my instructions will result in the immediate execution of your daughter. You will also be denied her remains for proper burial. The two gentlemen watching over your daughter do not particularly like you so I advise you not to provoke them. Speaking to anyone about your situation, such as Police, F.B.I., etc. will result in your daughter being beheaded. If we catch you talking to a stray dog, she dies. If you alert bank authorities, she dies. If the money is in any way marked or tampered with, she dies. You will be scanned for electronic devices and if any are found, she dies. You can try to deceive us but be warned that we are familiar with Law enforcement counter-measures and tactics. You stand a 99% chance of killing your daughter if you try to out smart us. Follow our instructions and you stand a 100% chance of getting her back. You and your family are under constant scrutiny as well as the authorities. Don't try to grow a brain John. You are not the only fat cat around so don't think that killing will be difficult. Don't underestimate us John. Use that good southern common sense of yours. It is up to you now John!*

*Victory!*

*S.B.T.C.*

This unusually long ransom note demanded an odd amount of money, which happened to be the same as John Ramsey's corporate bonus for 1996. The police discovered that the paper on which the note was written had been taken from a pad of paper found inside the family's home. The ink was from a felt-tipped pen the Ramseys kept in their kitchen.

## **POLICE ON THE SCENE**

Police officers, detectives, and crime scene technicians arrived at the house. The Ramseys called friends Fleet White, John Fernie, and their wives to come over for emotional support. A minister from the Ramseys' church and two victim's advocates who worked for the city of Boulder also arrived at the mansion. However, the police did not seal off the crime scene to protect evidence.

The parade of visitors was allowed to wander freely around the 6,500-square-foot house, contaminating potential evidence. Access to JonBenet's bedroom was not sealed off until 10:45 AM—four hours after the police were first called to the scene. It had snowed lightly several

times in the days leading up to the murder. Detectives searched the house but found no signs of forced entry or any fresh footprints in the snow outside, which led them to suspect that no intruder had entered the house and committed the murder.

Meanwhile, the 10 AM deadline that the kidnappers had given in their ransom note passed without a phone call to arrange for the money's delivery, and investigators allowed John Ramsey to go downstairs to his basement without a police escort. He later claimed that he had discovered that a broken window was open there. He closed it and returned upstairs without telling detectives what he had seen.

A few hours later, detective Linda Arndt asked Fleet White and John Fernie to take Ramsey through the house to see if any personal items may have been stolen. When the trio reached the basement, White pointed out the broken window. Ramsey said that he had broken it the previous summer. Once again, he failed to mention that he had found it open earlier.

The three men continued to walk around the basement. Minutes later, John Ramsey peeked into a room that was being transformed into a wine room. White had already checked it and seen nothing. This time, Ramsey discovered his daughter lying on the floor wrapped in a blanket. She was dead. Her arms were above her head. A cord was tied around her right wrist, and another piece of cord was wrapped around her neck.

One of Patsy Ramsey's broken paintbrush handles had been inserted between the cord and JonBenet's neck to make a crude garrote. Rather than leaving the body where it was and alerting police, Ramsey picked up his daughter in his arms and carried her lifeless body upstairs. He placed her under the family Christmas tree and told Arndt, "It has to be an inside job." A blanket was placed on JonBenet. In the process, this may have tainted any evidence that remained on her.

By the evening of December 26, the Ramseys had retained a lawyer. The following day, a team of three lawyers and private investigators that the Ramseys had hired questioned Fleet White and his wife at home. The Ramseys also hired a public relations specialist and John Douglas, a retired profiler of serial killers who had once worked for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. John and Patsy Ramsey soon also each hired their own separate legal counsel.

Contamination of the crime scene, which began when Patsy phoned police, continued. On December 28, her sister, who had come from Georgia to be with the family, entered the house to take clothes for John, Patsy, and Burke to wear to JonBenet's funeral. She entered the mansion

at least six times and left with bags, boxes, and suitcases that may have contained evidence in the murder case. The items she retrieved included jewelry, credit cards, some of JonBenet's dresses, and stuffed toys. A police officer advised detectives that Patsy's sister was removing far more than a few items of clothing from the house, but they offered no instructions to stop her.

The Ramseys believed that their daughter's killer knew the family would be away for a few hours on Christmas Day and would be back later. According to their theory, the killer planned to kidnap JonBenet in exchange for a ransom. He entered the house while the Ramseys were attending a Christmas party at the Whites home and wrote the ransom note while he waited. Then he hid until the family returned home and went to sleep. He walked upstairs to JonBenet's room and likely used a stun gun to render her unconscious. Then he carried her down to the basement and accidentally killed her during a sadistic sexual assault and fled, leaving the body behind.

## **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

The detectives did not agree, however, as a number of details just did not add up. No stun gun was ever found at the scene, but the ransom note and the body were both found inside the home. They also wondered why Patsy Ramsey had offered different explanations about how events had unfolded. She initially told police that she had checked on JonBenet at 5:45 AM and realized that her daughter was not in her bed. Then she found the ransom note on the stairs. In a subsequent version, she claimed that she had been on her way to the kitchen to get coffee when she found the note on the stairs. She said she then went to check on her daughter and discovered that she was missing.

An autopsy on JonBenet Ramsey concluded that she had been strangled to death and the right side of her skull had been fractured. She showed signs of more minor injuries, and she also appeared to have been sexually assaulted. A pubic hair was found on the blanket in which her body was wrapped, she had vaginal abrasions, her genitals appeared to have been wiped, and several dark fibers were found. A scan using ultraviolet light indicated the possibility of traces of semen on her thighs. Some DNA evidence was found under her fingernails and on the crotch of her underwear.

Police took a palm print from the door of the room in which JonBenet's body was found, but they were unable to identify it. The Ramseys said



that a black flashlight found on the kitchen counter did not belong to them, and detectives were not able to trace its owner. Investigators found a footprint on the floor next to the body and identified it as an imprint from a Hi-Tec sports shoe, but it, too, was never matched to the actual shoe. Blood, hair, and handwriting samples were taken from members of the Ramsey family and some of their friends.

In the months following the murder, eight detectives were assigned to the case. They interviewed 590 people and cleared more than 100 suspects. They collected 1,058 pieces of physical evidence and sent more than 500 for testing at forensic laboratories. They included hair, blood, handwriting samples, and other items from 215 people. Investigators also followed leads in 17 states and two foreign countries.

This murder was particularly marked by the media frenzy of tabloid coverage. Reporters from as far away as France and Australia converged on Boulder to cover the story. Reporters staked out the company of John Ramsey's father, John Bennett Ramsey. They were also chased from the University of Colorado fraternity house where JonBenet's stepbrother lived, and her grandparents' home near Atlanta. More than 20 camera crews and 100 reporters crammed into City Council chambers in Boulder for a news conference in the week following the murder.

The Ramseys hired crisis communications expert Patrick S. Korten to work with the media. The former spokesman for the U.S. Department of Justice had handled media relations for such incidents as the 1985 hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* cruise liner. Korten posted the Ramsey family's statements on a Web site created especially for the media that were covering the murder. He also arranged for reporters to photograph the family being consoled by Bishop Jerry Winterrowd of the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado at the door of their church on January 5, 1997. "I am trying to make sure that stories that might have some unfavorable view on the family not get out without hearing from me," Korten told the *New York Times*.

The media coverage was marked by checkbook journalism by outlets thirsty for news. They paid for interviews with the victim's pageant costume seamstress or with a nanny who stopped working for the family before JonBenet was born. The *Globe* paid \$5,500 for five crime scene photos and matched the \$50,000 reward that the Ramsey family posted for information leading to a conviction in the case. The Sygma Photo Agency paid \$7,500 to a photographer for his archive of JonBenet modeling photos. CBS won a bidding war against ABC and paid \$4,000 for 1984 video footage of the interior of the Ramsey home.

In January 1997, former deputy sheriff Brent A. Sawyer and former photo laboratory employee Lawrence S. Smith were arrested and charged with obstructing government operations. They had sold stolen crime scene photos to the *Globe* and were later fined and sentenced to three days of solitary confinement in jail.

Police cleared Burke Ramsey of any involvement in his sister's assault and murder. His stepbrother and stepsister, who had been staying with their mother in Atlanta at the time of the murder, were cleared in March 1997. This occurred nearly three months after JonBenet was killed because John Ramsey had hired an Atlanta lawyer who instructed them not to cooperate with police, which delayed the police's ability to interview them and conclude they had no connection to the murder.

That same month, DNA testing was delayed when the prosecutor's office in Boulder asked the Ramseys if they wanted to have a family representative present to observe the DNA testing. They responded two weeks later, after returning from a one-week vacation in Sea Island, Georgia, that it wasn't necessary. No semen was found on JonBenet's body, nor in her bedroom or in the basement where her body was found.

In the first few months following their daughter's murder, the Ramseys gave the Boulder police samples of their handwriting, including some that copied the ransom note's wording, but in their own writing. John Ramsey was quickly cleared, after police determined that his writing was not similar to that which was found on the ransom note. Patsy Ramsey submitted five handwriting samples to the Colorado Bureau of Investigation to compare with the 370-word ransom note. They also searched the family's summer home in Charlevoix, Michigan, for "unrehearsed" writing samples belonging to her. Police could not say whether she was the author of the note, but they could not exclude her, either.

On the advice of their lawyers, the Ramseys refused to give police formal videotaped interviews. They finally broke their silence four months later. On April 30, 1997, John Ramsey submitted to a two-hour tape-recorded police interview and Patsy Ramsey was interrogated for six hours. A few days later, in May, they held a news conference to proclaim their innocence. They also bought a full-page advertisement in the *Boulder Daily Camera* featuring a kindergarten picture of JonBenet, to promote their \$100,00 reward for information leading to their daughter's killer, but it yielded no new information.

The media's fascination with the story continued. In December 1997, reporters packed Boulder's City Council chambers for a rare news

conference on the case. CNN, NBC, MSNBC, and the Fox network broadcast the half-hour news conference live across the country. The tabloid the *Globe* posted \$500,000 for information leading to the conviction of JonBenet's killer. The *National Enquirer* offered the Ramseys \$1 million to take a polygraph test administered by technicians hired by the newspaper.

## GRAND JURY

In June 1998, prosecutors questioned the Ramseys for three days, separately, in videotaped interviews. They also conducted an interview with the couple's son Burke in the family's new home in Atlanta. A grand jury was convened three months later, in September 1998, to investigate JonBenet's killing and to use its powers to subpoena information that the police had been unable to access for nearly two years. A grand jury can indict someone if it finds probable cause that the person committed the crime.

The Ramseys had refused to meet for an interview with Commander Mark Beckner, who took over as Boulder's police chief in December 1997. A grand jury can force evidence to be turned over. Witnesses can invoke their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, but a grand jury can offer them immunity to compel them to testify. Spouses can be forced to testify against each other in cases of major crimes, such as a murder or child abuse, if the victim is under the age of 12 and the suspect was a person in a position of trust.

The grand jury, which was convened on September 15, 1998, was composed of four men and eight women. They reviewed more than 30,000 pages of reports and hundreds of pieces of evidence, including the cord and paintbrush that were used to strangle JonBenet. They also heard from handwriting experts, police, detectives, Burke, and John Ramsey's adult children Melinda Ramsey Long and John Andrew Ramsey. However, John and Patsy Ramsey were never called to testify.

Thirteen months later, in October 1999, prosecutors said that they did not have enough evidence to charge anyone with killing JonBenet, and the grand jury was dismissed. Fingers were pointed at shoddy police work that allowed the crime scene to be repeatedly contaminated and a district attorney's alleged deference to the Ramseys by not questioning them for months. In 1999, Colorado governor Bill Owens decided not to appoint a special prosecutor in the case, but he also accused the Ramseys of hiding behind their lawyers.

The Ramseys published a memoir called *Death of Innocence* a year later in 2000. That year, on August 4, a private investigator that the Ramseys had hired gave police a pair of Hi-Tec boots, size eight-and-a-half, which allegedly matched the mildew footprint that was found in the family's basement on December 26, 1996. The boots looked similar to others that could also be a match. Boulder police sent them to the Colorado Bureau of Investigation for analysis, but their owner was never identified.

On August 7, 2001, a subscriber to *America Online* posted a message on his Web site claiming to have witnessed JonBenet's murder. He said, "I feel so guilty for what I've done. I was there when the whole thing occurred. I never wanted any part in it but they said if I didn't help I would be killed as well. I was only 14 when this took place, so I went along with the whole plan." Police thought that they had a new lead. *America Online* in Dulles, Virginia, provided them with the subscriber's name on September 8, 2001, but as with other leads before it, this one petered out. Two years later, an Atlanta judge dismissed a lawsuit against the Ramseys that was brought by a journalist the couple claimed was a potential suspect in their daughter's murder. The judge said that it was just as likely for an intruder to be the culprit. Boulder's district attorney Mary Lacey agreed.

## SUSPECT

Patsy Ramsey, then 49, died of ovarian cancer in June 2006. Two months later, American schoolteacher John M. Karr was arrested in Bangkok, Thailand, on August 16, 2006, in connection with JonBenet's murder. Hordes of reporters tracked the story, from his arrest to his extradition back to the United States. Karr had lived in Conyers, Georgia, while the Ramseys lived in the Atlanta suburb of Dunwoody about 30 miles away before they moved to Colorado. He came to the police's attention when they were considering him as a possible suspect in connection with child pornography. In an exchange of e-mails and telephone conversations with a University of Colorado professor, Karr had said that he was interested in young girls, particularly six-year-olds. Using the pseudonym Daxis, he claimed to have left a garrote around JonBenet's neck too long and then hit her on the head.

Karr already faced five misdemeanor counts in California for possessing child pornography on his computer. He had been held in Sonoma County jail for six months in 2001, and was released. A judge issued a

warrant for his arrest when he failed to appear for a court date. The case against him in connection with the Ramsey murder collapsed two weeks after Karr's arrest, when DNA tests refuted his claims that he had killed her. Authorities also investigated his whereabouts at the time of the murder in 1996, and that is when they discovered that he had spent Christmas with his family.

In July 2008, Boulder County district attorney Mary T. Lacey sent a letter to John Ramsey. She indicated that a private laboratory, Bode Technology Group from Lorton, Virginia, tested material that had been scraped from the waistband of the long johns that JonBenet was wearing the night she died. Newly developed "Touch DNA" analysis looked for traces of genetic material that could not be detected using earlier forensic techniques. It discovered traces of an unidentified male's DNA on JonBenet's long johns that was not from a family member. It was most likely from the killer, who would have handled her long johns as he removed them that night. The DNA traces matched those taken from a drop of blood found on JonBenet's underwear early on in the investigation. That drop of blood was not from a member of the Ramsey family, either. In the letter, Lacey said that the results of this latest test vindicated the Ramsey family, but it did not solve the murder. What happened inside the Ramsey home the night of December 26, 1996, remains a mystery.

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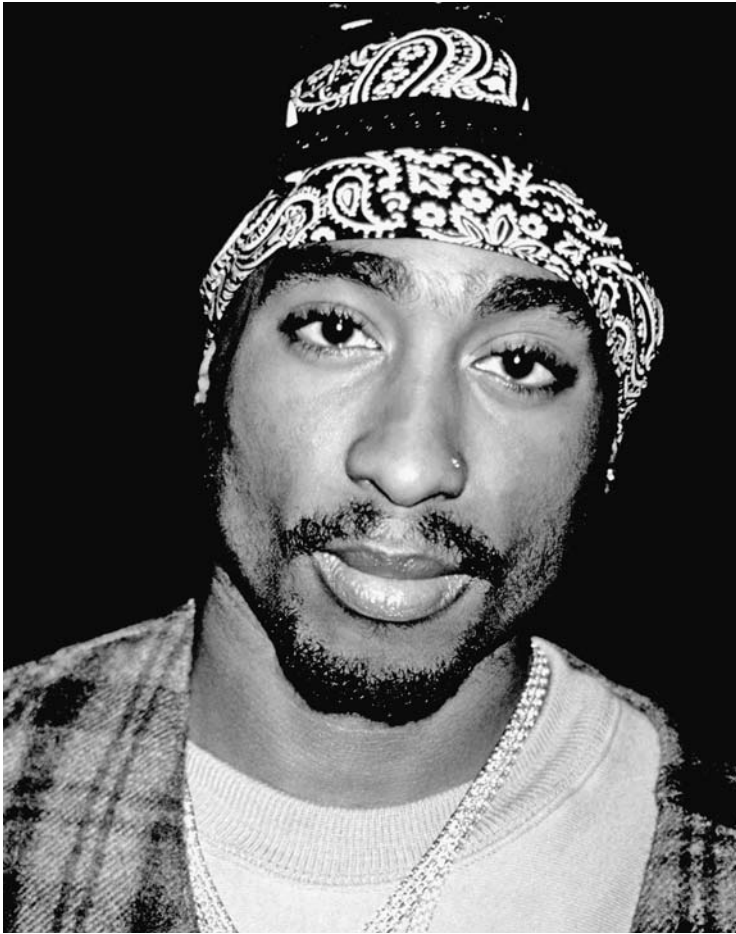
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Rapper/artist Tupac Shakur was killed in a drive-by shooting. Mitchell Gerber/Corbis.

# Rap Race: The Death of Tupac Amaru Shakur (1996)

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*The life and death of rap star Tupac Amaru Shakur came to prominence during the rise of gangsta rap, a style of music associated with lyrics that focused on inner city violence.*

In the last five years of his life, rapper and actor Tupac Amaru Shakur lived as violently as he died. His mother, Afeni Shakur, was a member of the radical black power group the Black Panthers before he was born. In fact, she was pregnant with him while she was in prison on charges of conspiring to bomb public buildings in New York. She and her co-defendants were acquitted in May 1971, and her son was born the following month on June 16, in New York City. She named him Tupac Amaru after an Inca chief who was executed for leading a revolt against the Spaniards. In the ensuing years, he and his sister Sekyiwa were raised in poverty and at homeless shelters in the Bronx and Harlem as Afeni fought an addiction to crack.

Tupac joined an acting troupe in Harlem at the age of 12, which gave him a creative outlet and an emotional escape from the difficulties of his life. He appeared in the play *A Raisin in the Sun*. When the family moved to Baltimore, Shakur was enrolled in the Baltimore School of the Arts in 1986. He studied ballet and poetry, but acting proved to be where his creativity shone the brightest. He wrote and performed his first rap, which was about gun control, after a friend was shot while playing with guns. Shakur moved again two years later when he was 17. This time, he headed to Marin City in northern California. He dropped out of high school and began selling drugs, but later he earned a general high school equivalency diploma.

Shakur's life began to turn around when he joined the Bay Area hip hop group Digital Underground as a roadie and dancer in 1989. He appeared on the group's 1990 record *This Is an EP Release* and on the Grammy-nominated album *Sons of the P* in 1991. Shakur gained valuable experience while touring and recording with Digital Underground. Then he launched his own solo rap and acting career when he signed his first record deal in 1991. He was only 20 years old.

By the time Shakur had launched his own career, the gangsta style of rap had taken off in Los Angeles. The lyrics of this type of music reflected a more violent, inner-city lifestyle. His debut album *2Pacalypse Now* sold half a million copies and included the singles, "Trapped" and "Brenda's Got a Baby," about the plight of an unwed teenage mother. He also launched a movie career, playing the role of Bishop in the film *Juice*. Then he appeared in the 1993 film *Poetic Justice* opposite Janet

Jackson and *Above the Rim* in 1994. He released his second album *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z* that same year, selling a million copies. That album was followed a year later by *Thug Life, Vol. 1*, an album that Shakur released in collaboration with a group of rappers.

## BRUSHES WITH THE LAW

Shakur's music explored themes such as gang violence, police brutality, teenage pregnancy, hardship, and racism. As Shakur's recording and acting careers were taking off, however, so were his brushes with the law. He filed a \$10-million lawsuit against the police department in Oakland, California, in October 1991, claiming that two officers arrested him for jaywalking and assaulted him.

His first album, *2Pacalypse Now* included songs about killing police officers. A teenager who stole a vehicle and shot a Texas state trooper in the spring of 1992 claimed that the album had inspired him to commit the murder. This prompted U.S. vice president Dan Quayle to publicly denounce Shakur. The youth was convicted in the killing, but the state trooper's widow filed a civil suit against Shakur, Interscope Records, and parent company Time Warner. Shakur was attending a festival marking the fiftieth anniversary of Marin City, California, when a shoot-out occurred between his group and some rivals. A member of Shakur's entourage fired a gun, killing six-year-old Qa'id Walker-Teal in the crossfire. Police did not lay criminal charges, but the victim's mother filed a civil lawsuit for wrongful death against Shakur and Interscope Records. It was settled out of court in 1995 for a reported \$300,000 to \$500,000.

In 1993, Shakur and his friends were driving after a concert at Clark Atlanta University in Georgia. They nearly hit brothers Mark and Scott Whitwell, who were on foot, and an argument ensued. The police alleged that the two brothers were shot and wounded. Shakur was arrested and charged with shooting the two off-duty police officers, but witnesses said the rap star and his entourage shot back after the officers in civilian clothes had fired at his car. The charges were dropped for lack of evidence. That same year, Shakur was sentenced to 10 days in jail after allegedly beating up another rapper in Michigan with a baseball bat.

The rapper was indicted in November 1993 when a 20-year-old woman accused him and three of his friends of sexually assaulting her in the suite of a Manhattan hotel. Shakur was convicted and sentenced in February 1995 to one-and-a-half to four years behind bars. While he was on trial, however, he was shot five times in the lobby of a recording



studio in Manhattan's Times Square in November 1994. The shooters also stole \$40,000 worth of jewelry. Shakur later blamed rival rapper Notorious B.I.G., also known as Biggie Smalls, as having been involved because he was in the same recording studio at the time. This fueled a rivalry between the two men.

As Shakur sat behind bars serving eight months for sexual assault, he married longtime girlfriend Keisha Morris, but the wedding was later annulled. The rap star's album *Me Against the World* had just been released and sold 2 million copies, making it to the top spot on the Billboard album chart. Marion "Suge" Knight, the founder of Death Row Records, paid him a visit in jail and offered him a deal. The company, which had signed some of the West Coast's top hip hop artists, would put up the \$1.4-million bail and, in exchange, Shakur agreed to a three-record deal with the company. He was released from prison in October 1995 while appealing his sexual assault conviction.

Soon after Shakur's release from prison, he wasted no time recording *All Eyez on Me*, a double CD that sold more than 5 million copies and debuted in the top spot on the music charts. Other projects were underway. He filmed *Gridlock'd* and *Gang Related*, and he planned to tour in the fall of 1996 with such Death Row artists as Snoop Doggy Dogg.

But luck finally ran out for the man who had the words "Thug Life" and "Outlaw" tattooed on his body. On September 6, 1996, Shakur went to a prizefight at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas with Death Row Records founder Suge Knight. The men were surrounded by bodyguards. The championship fight between boxers Mike Tyson and Bruce Seldon lasted barely two minutes. Tyson knocked out his opponent at 8:39 PM, and at about 8:45 PM, Shakur and the rest of the Death Row entourage were leaving the match when they became involved in an argument with a young black man. The situation escalated into a fight. The young man was knocked over and then repeatedly kicked and punched. The hotel's security guards quickly intervened to break up the fight. The group left the hotel about 10 minutes later and headed over to the Luxor Hotel before they drove off to get ready to attend an anti-gang youth event at Knight's Club 662.

## SHOOTING

They climbed into Knight's black BMW 750 sedan and drove downtown with Shakur sitting in the passenger seat. The head of Death Row

Records led a procession of vehicles as part of his entourage. As they were heading east on Flamingo Road near Koval Lane at about 11:15 PM, they stopped at a traffic light near the Maxim Hotel. A white four-door Cadillac with four passengers pulled up beside them to their right. Shakur did not immediately notice them, as he was busy flirting with a group of women in another vehicle to his left. Someone in the white Cadillac stuck a hand out the window and began firing. Shakur tried to climb into the backseat for cover, but Knight pulled him down. Four shots from a high-caliber handgun tore into Shakur, and Knight was grazed in the head. Then the Cadillac fled south on Koval.

Knight turned his bullet-riddled vehicle around and raced west towards Las Vegas Boulevard. Two police officers followed them and stopped the car at the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Harmon Avenue. They called an ambulance to rush the two men to the University of Nevada Medical Center. Knight was treated in the hospital and released, but Shakur was admitted in critical condition. He had been struck twice in the chest. Doctors operated on him twice over the next few days, removing his right lung and trying to stop the internal bleeding. They put him on a respirator and placed him in a medically induced coma hoping to give his body time to recover. But he died nearly a week later, on Friday, September 13, 1996, at 4:03 PM. He was only 25 years old. His body was cremated and his family held a private service in Las Vegas the next day. Shakur was survived by his mother, Afeni Shakur, his father, Billy Garland, and his half-sister, Sekyiwa.

The police investigation proved to be difficult, as witnesses were reluctant to cooperate. The only evidence the police had were the number of shots that had been fired and some physical evidence, but theories as to who was responsible for Shakur's murder were more plentiful. Knight was associated with the Bloods, a Los Angeles street gang, and some people speculated that the young man they beat up at the MGM Grand was a member of the rival Crips gang. Shakur's shooting, therefore, was in retaliation for the pounding earlier that evening. Despite the theories, Shakur's murder has never been solved.

Shakur's star continued to shine for years after his violent death. His mother, Afeni, launched the Tupac Amaru Shakur Foundation in his memory in 1997, and the Tupac Amaru Shakur Performing Arts and Cultural Center opened in Stone Mountain, Georgia, in 2005. She also set up Amaru Records to look after her son's musical legacy. Records continued to be released posthumously, including the two-CD volume *Until the End of Time*, which sold nearly half a million copies its first week.

His story also inspired numerous books and more than a dozen documentaries, including *Tupac: Resurrection*, which was nominated for a 2005 Academy Award in the Best Documentary category. The New York Theater Workshop brought his life to the stage in 2001 in the play *Up Against the Wind*.

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Biggie Smalls won rap artist and rap single of the year at the annual Billboard Music Awards in New York City on December 6, 1995. AP Photo/Mark Lennihan.

# Rap Race Part Two: The Murder of Biggie Smalls (1997)

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*The murder of Biggie Smalls is believed to have been part of a rivalry between East Coast and West Coast rappers, but his murderer has never been found.*

Christopher George Latore Wallace quit school at the age of 17 and never went back. The teenager was born in Brooklyn and raised in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of New York. He was a good student, winning English prizes at Queen of All Saints Middle School. He began selling drugs when he was about 12 years old, while his mother taught preschool during the day. She had been raising her son alone since Wallace's father walked out on the family when her son was two years old. Wallace's life as a drug dealer led to his arrest in 1989 for carrying an unregistered firearm, and he received five years probation. In 1991 he was charged with dealing cocaine in North Carolina and spent nine months in jail waiting to make bail.

While Wallace earned money by selling drugs out of a garbage can on Fulton Street, he indulged in his passion for rap by making tapes in a basement on Bedford Avenue. Copies of his music began circulating among people in the neighborhood, and one tape found its way into the hands of producer Sean (Puffy) Combs, president of record label Bad Boy Entertainment. Combs promised to make Wallace a star.

Wallace, who went by the stage names of Notorious B.I.G. and Biggie Smalls, burst onto the rap scene with the release of his first album *Ready to Die* on September 13, 1994, and the single *Juicy*. The album, which drew on his experience as a crack dealer on Fulton Street, sold more than a million copies. In December 1995, he was named Rap Artist of the Year at the Billboard Music Awards. The name Biggie Smalls was inspired by a character in the 1975 Sidney Poitier film *Let's Do It Again*. Smalls mentored neighborhood rap group Junior M.A.F.I.A. and helped them record and release their first CD in 1995, *Conspiracy*. He also became the executive producer of Kim "Lil Kim" Jones's debut solo album *Hard Core* in 1996.

At six-foot, three-inches tall and weighing nearly 300 pounds, Smalls appeared to be larger than life. He married singer Faith Evans on August 4, 1994, soon after meeting her at a photo shoot for Bad Boy Entertainment, the record label to which both were signed. About a year later, the duo were on the charts for their separate careers. The number-one single was Smalls's "One More Chance," while Evans grabbed the number-six spot with "You Used to Love Me." Their son, Christopher

Wallace Jr., was born on October 29, 1996. The marriage was rocky, however, and Smalls reportedly had an affair with “Lil Kim” Jones.

Despite the fact that Smalls was successful and had left his drug-dealing past behind, he continued to fear that his life was in danger. It was a sentiment that he had been unable to shake from his past. He kept two 9-millimeter Rugers under the mattress of his bed. In 1994, rappers Tupac Amaru Shakur and a member of Wu-Tang were shot in what appeared to be attempted robberies, and these incidents did little to assuage his fears.

The appearance of Smalls on the rap scene and his success prompted a rivalry between him and West Coast rapper Shakur, who was with the Death Row label. That rivalry was further fueled by Shakur’s shooting on November 30, 1994. He was shot four times and robbed of \$40,000 worth of jewelry in the lobby of the Quad Recording Studios off New York City’s Times Square. Shakur accused Smalls of being involved, but there was no evidence. In 1995, Smalls released the single “Who Shot Ya,” which was a reference to Shakur’s shooting. The following year, Shakur released “Hit ’Em Up,” which attacked East Coast artists, including Smalls. In retaliation, he also claimed to have slept with Biggie’s wife, Faith Evans.

## TROUBLES WITH THE LAW

The brushes with the law that Smalls had had while he was a drug dealer did not come to an end with his rise to fame. On March 23, 1996, Wallace went to the Palladium nightclub on East 14th Street on Manhattan’s Lower East Side to watch a performance by his wife, Faith Evans. As he stepped outside the club at about 4:30 AM, two fans approached him for autographs. An argument ensued, and the two fans hailed a cab and drove off. Wallace and his friend Damion Butler followed behind them in his car. While the two vehicles were stopped for a traffic light at the intersection of Union Square West and 16th Street, Wallace and Butler climbed out of their car and smashed the cab’s windows with a baseball bat. The two men were arrested and charged with assault.

In July 1996, Smalls was arrested at his home in Teaneck, New Jersey, along with seven members of his group Junior M.A.F.I.A. After searching the house, police found a 9-millimeter pistol with a 30-round clip, two guns with infrared, laser-targeting devices attached, a revolver, and almost 50 grams of marijuana. Smalls faced weapons and drug

possession charges. In a civil suit in January 1997, Smalls was ordered to pay \$25,000 to a New Jersey man who was beaten up in May 1995 in a dispute over a canceled performance in New Jersey.

On the West Coast, Shakur was fatally wounded in a drive-by shooting on September 9, 1996, in Las Vegas. He died in the hospital five days later. Wallace subsequently began recording his next CD. *Life After Death* was scheduled for release on March 25, 1997. In one of his last interviews, Smalls told a San Francisco radio station that he was worried about his safety because of his high-profile celebrity status.

Three days later, on Saturday March 9, 1997, Smalls was just two months shy of his twenty-fifth birthday. He went to a party at the Petersen Automotive Museum on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. The event was thrown by Qwest Records and *Vibe* magazine to celebrate the 11th Annual Soul Train Music Awards. The party, whose guests included the who's who of the hip hop world, was filled to more than capacity with about 1,700 people. The fire department's fire marshals shut it down at 12:35 AM when the museum became too crowded.

Partygoers poured out of the event and were standing on the sidewalk afterwards. Smalls, Combs, and the rest of their entourage waited for the valet to bring around their vehicles. Combs climbed in beside his driver, and his three bodyguards sat in the backseat. Smalls settled into the passenger seat of a GMC Suburban sport utility vehicle along with two other passengers, James "L'il Caesar" Lloyd, member of the Junior M.A.F.I.A. rap group, and Smalls's best friend Butler. In anticipation of the artist's upcoming release of his second album, his car bore the sticker "Think B.I.G. March 25."

## SHOOTING

They pulled out of the parking garage and drove up to the stoplight at the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Fairfax. Moments later, a black Impala pulled up to the right of Smalls's vehicle. The lone occupant pulled out an automatic pistol and fired at least five shots into the Suburban's passenger side. Smalls slumped forward, blood seeping through his jacket. The shooter sped away. The rap star, who was the only one in his vehicle to be hit, was rushed to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center less than five minutes away. He was pronounced dead at 1:15 AM, soon after he had arrived. His death came six months after the drive-by shooting of gangsta rapper Tupac Amaru Shakur. He left behind estranged wife Faith, mother Voletta Watson, and a five-month-old son.

Smalls's body was returned to New York City, where more than 350 people including music stars Queen Latifah and Lil Kim, attended a private service at the Frank E. Campbell Funeral Chapel at Madison Avenue and 81st Street on the Upper East Side. Afterwards, a motorcade crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. The hearse with Smalls's body dressed in a double-breasted white suit and white hat took a final tour through Clinton Hill and his old neighborhood of Fort Greene. By then, a memorial had sprung up in front of his childhood apartment building on St. James Place. The trip down memory lane was a peaceful affair, except for a brief clash when police arrested 10 people after some teenagers jumped up on parked cars and a dumpster on Fulton Street and began to dance once the hearse had passed by.

Two weeks later, Smalls's second album, *Life After Death . . . 'Til Death Do Us Part*, was released on March 25, 1997. It debuted in the number-one spot on the music charts and sold 690,000 copies in its first week. In advertisements for the record, Smalls was shown leaning against a tombstone in a graveyard. By then, the Los Angeles police had concluded that the killing was not due to a feud between rappers on the East Coast and those on the West Coast. They believed that it was the result of a financial dispute between the rap star and a member of a street gang over a fee for security that they had provided to Smalls during a previous visit to the West Coast.

Witnesses gave the police descriptions of the shooter and his vehicle. Investigators had also recovered four spent shell casings from the gun. Four women visiting Los Angeles for the Soul Train Music Awards phoned the television show *America's Most Wanted* to report that they had inadvertently videotaped Smalls's killer. Police released sketches of the man they believed to be the shooter, based on the descriptions of eyewitnesses. In June 1997, police impounded a Chevrolet Impala that matched the description of the car that was used in the killing, but the leads hit a dead end.

Nearly three years later, Combs issued an album of Biggie's previously unreleased material. *Born Again* appeared on December 7, 1999. A feature-length documentary about Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur was made and released by Nick Broomfield in 2002. In January 2009, the film *Notorious* was released. It starred Jamal Woolard, a rapper also known as Gravy, as Biggie Smalls. He was raised just a few blocks from the man he depicted on-screen.

Following a wrongful death lawsuit that Voletta Wallace launched in civil court, six veteran homicide detectives with the Los Angeles Police



Department headed a new task force in 2006 to investigate the unsolved killing. Wallace claimed that rogue police officers were involved in her son's murder. The lawsuit ended in a mistrial in 2005 after a police detective hid a jailhouse informant's statement that linked two former police officers to the killing. Another civil suit, against the city of Los Angeles, named two Los Angeles police officers. The lawsuit was thrown out in December 2007, but it was reinstated in May 2008. However, the case of who murdered Biggie Smalls remains unsolved.

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Washington intern Chandra Levy was murdered just days before returning home to California. Ron Sachs/CNP/Sygma/Corbis.

# Bringing Down a Congressman: The Death of Chandra Levy (2001)

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*After the initial publicity surrounding Chandra Levy's disappearance and murder, police struggled quietly to find her killer. The cold case was reopened in 2007 as part of a larger review of the police force's unsolved cases. That's when it was linked to an illegal immigrant who was already behind bars in connection with two assaults in the same park where Levy's remains were found.*

Twenty-three-year-old Chandra Ann Levy was young, ambitious, and attracted to the halls of power. She interned for the mayor of Los Angeles when she was an undergraduate at San Francisco State University. While she was a graduate student at the University of Southern California, she interned for the governor of California. She had completed most of the requirements for her master's degree in public administration from the University of Southern California when she left home in Modesto, California, and rented an apartment in Washington, D.C., in September 2000. Her internship at the Federal Bureau of Prisons began on October 23.

In the month following Levy's arrival in the capital, she met Congressional representative Gary Condit, 53, a Democrat for her conservative California district. She and a friend had dropped in to see him at his Capitol Hill office, and he offered the friend, who had no job, an internship. Condit was the son of a Baptist preacher. He had married Carolyn Berry just after high school in 1967 and they had two children, son Chad and daughter Cadee. A career politician, he was elected to the Ceres City Council just after college, at the age of 24, and became mayor two years later. He joined the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors at the age of 28, was elected a state assemblyman at 35, and then elected to the U.S. Congress in 1989 at the age of 41.

Condit was nearly 30 years older than Levy, but the two soon began dating. He gave her gifts of chocolate and a gold bracelet. He also imposed rules about how to avoid being seen together. They had to keep their romance a secret. She would contact him by leaving a message at a telephone number that played music or she called his office. Condit also instructed her not to get off the elevator when she reached his floor in the apartment building where he lived in the trendy Adams Morgan neighborhood if anyone else was riding with her. If someone asked, she was to say that she was visiting a sick friend. The two saw each other several times a week. During a visit that Levy paid to her aunt Linda Zamsky for Passover in April 2001, the young intern let it slip that Condit was her boyfriend.

Levy returned to Washington, where she celebrated her twenty-fourth birthday on April 14, 2001. Her internship ended nine days later, after the Federal Bureau of Prisons discovered that she was no longer eligible for an internship since she had completed her coursework and was, therefore, no longer a student. Levy prepared to return to California for her graduation ceremonies, which were set for May 11 at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

She was upbeat as she talked to her parents, Susan and Dr. Robert Levy, on the phone on April 27. That evening, she hung out with her friend Robert Kurkjian and his roommates, having beer and pizza and watching movies. She spoke to Condit on April 29 about her upcoming travel plans and graduation. The following day, she cancelled her membership at the Washington Sports Club on Connecticut Avenue. Her bags were packed, and she was excited about going home to Modesto.

On May 1, she sat down at her computer at 9 AM and searched the Internet all morning. She sent her parents an e-mail regarding her airplane fares to fly home on Southwest Airlines and then looked up the Web site for Rock Creek Park, a 1,754-acre green space located about three miles from her apartment. She logged off for the last time at 1 PM and then left her Dupont Circle apartment. For the next several days, her parents phoned repeatedly to confirm their daughter's travel plans. When they were unable to reach her, they became concerned and called the building manager.

## DISAPPEARANCE

On May 6, nine days after Susan and Robert Levy last talked to Chandra and five days after her last e-mail to them, they called Condit for help. He had been unable to reach Levy as well, but he only learned of her disappearance from her parents. The Levys called the police and asked them to go to their daughter's home in Washington, D.C. When officers searched her apartment, they found two pieces of luggage that were packed, jewelry, her driver's license, and credit cards. Some of her clothes were still hanging in the closet. There were dirty dishes in the sink and dirty laundry in a bag. Besides Levy herself, only her keys were missing. There were no signs of foul play.

Robert Levy told detectives that he believed his daughter was having an affair with Condit. She had confided in his sister-in-law, and her cell-phone bills indicated that she had called his office repeatedly. They interviewed Condit at his Washington, D.C., condo on the evening of May 9.

The following day, he asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation to help in the search for Levy, and he also contributed \$10,000 from his campaign treasury toward a reward for information leading to Levy's whereabouts. This amount brought the total reward money to \$42,000. It was not until his third interview with police, two months later, that Condit finally confessed that he was having an extramarital affair with Levy at the time of her disappearance. Police and FBI agents conducted a three-and-a-half-hour search of his apartment, but found no signs of a struggle or foul play.

Condit said that he knew nothing about Levy's disappearance and refused, in media interviews, to divulge the nature of his relationship with Chandra Levy. He passed a polygraph test that his lawyer arranged to have administered by a former FBI agent. Police decided not to arrange to have him take one after his lawyers insisted on placing restrictions on the types of questions that investigators could ask.

Detectives also interviewed Levy's friends, neighbors, co-workers, and employees of the gym where she had cancelled her membership just before she vanished. No one could shed any light on her whereabouts. Since there were no signs of foul play, investigators continued to treat Levy's disappearance as a missing person case. FBI agents joined Washington, D.C., police in a search of abandoned buildings throughout the D.C. area as well as of Rock Creek Park, but they found no sign of Levy.

The Levys were concerned about the police investigation. They held a news conference in Washington, D.C., on May 17, 2001, to draw public attention to their daughter's disappearance. They also met with police detectives. The story finally hit the national headlines and began being featured on television stations CNN and NBC. The coverage would come to overwhelm the investigation, pointing detectives in the wrong direction for months. They initially believed that Condit knew more about Chandra's disappearance. On June 14, her parents held another news conference; they insisted that their congressman reveal everything he knew about Chandra's disappearance. Condit maintained that he had given police as much information as he possessed.

In early July, Levy's aunt went public about her niece's affair with the married congressman, and Levy turned out not to be the only one with a secret. United Airlines flight attendant Anne Marie Smith stepped forward on July 2 and said that she had had a 10-month affair with Condit. They first met on July 10, 2000, aboard a flight from San Francisco to Dulles and they met for dinner two days later. During their courtship

they met in hotels in California, and she occasionally stayed at his Washington, D.C., condominium.

Smith also said that she was asked to sign an affidavit denying the affair. In an interview with Fox Television, Smith displayed a copy of a draft affidavit in which she was to say, "I did not and have not had a relationship with Congressman Condit other than being acquainted with him. I do not and have not had a romantic relationship with Congressman Condit. I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing is true and correct."

Condit denied that Smith had been asked to lie. Several weeks later, one of his former staffers Joleen Argentini McKay said that she had had a three-year affair with the married congressman in the mid-1990s. Police launched a preliminary investigation into a possible obstruction of justice by Condit, including the potential role of two of his staffers.

Several hours before police searched Condit's apartment on July 10, the congressman was spotted tossing out the box for a watch that a female former aide had given him. Police were tipped off, and they found it the following day in a trash bin near a McDonald's in Alexandria, Virginia. It was the box that had once held the watch that former congressional aide McKay had given him.

On July 25, 2001, police cadets searched Rock Creek Park but found no trace of Levy. Meanwhile, Condit continued to be dogged by reporters, as media coverage intensified and continued relentlessly around the clock. It had now reached a fever pitch. Journalists camped outside the house that he shared with his wife Carolyn on Acorn Lane in Ceres, just south of Modesto, California. According to a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll that was conducted at the time, 63 percent of Americans admitted that they were following the story.

On August 12, the *Modesto Bee* newspaper, which had supported Condit throughout his 30-year political career, called for his resignation. That is when the congressman realized that it was time for him to go on the offensive. He launched a campaign to try to rescue his tarnished image. He agreed to an interview with ABC Television news anchor Connie Chung and a cover story for *People* magazine, but he refused to disclose information during the television interview about his relationship with Levy—and that made him appear evasive.

The story of Levy's disappearance and her affair with Condit finally slid out of the spotlight when terrorists bombed New York City's World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. But Condit's problems did not. On March 6, 2002, he lost his bid to be reelected to Congress as the

representative for the Modesto, California, area. His philandering and involvement with a woman younger than his own daughter had destroyed his political career.

## HOMICIDE INVESTIGATION

More than two months later, a man was walking his dog along a wooded bank in Rock Creek Park on May 22, 2002, at 9:30 AM. He spotted a piece of clothing and stumbled upon a half-buried human skull. The remains were scattered in a remote area of the wooded park, not far from a jogging trail, along with pieces of clothing, a pair of sunglasses, a sneaker, and a Sony Walkman. The man called the police. The spot was not far from where searchers had looked for Levy the previous year, but they stopped just short of where her remains were eventually found.

Later that day, medical examiners used dental records to positively identify Levy. Medical Examiner Dr. Jonathan Arden concluded that she was a homicide victim, but he was not able to determine how she was killed. It appeared that she had been tied up using a torn leotard that had been twisted into a rope. Her remains were found a mile north of Klinge Mansion in the park. Klinge was the park's headquarters, located in a three-story farmhouse. Just before she disappeared 13 months earlier, Levy had visited the building's Web site. Now that police had found the young woman's remains, a missing person case finally became a homicide investigation. More than 1,000 people joined Levy's family for a memorial service in Modesto, California's, convention center. Her grandmother, great-aunt, brother, and friends spoke during the 90-minute ceremony.

Washington, D.C., police and the Mobile Crime Unit spent more than a week searching the woods where Chandra's remains were located. They found small bones, a sock, and some teeth. On June 6, after the police had completed their search, two investigators hired by the Levy family went to Rock Creek Park. They discovered Chandra's shinbone and a piece of twisted wire that police had missed during their search. The police returned to the scene and resumed their search yet again, this time with the help of trained volunteer searchers. They uncovered more bones, including a foot-long bone, and two small bones no more than two inches long, which resembled other bones in Levy's foot.

Police decided to re-interview Salvadorean illegal immigrant Ingmar Guandique. He had made his way to the United States in 2000 and lived near Rock Creek Park at the time of Levy's disappearance. In fact,

he had failed to show up for work at his construction job on the day that she vanished. He was arrested on May 7, 2001, after breaking into a neighbor's apartment and was charged with burglary and released after promising to appear for a court date on May 29.

Guandique approached Halle Shilling, a 30-year-old writer, on May 14, 2001, while she was jogging in Rock Creek Park. She fought him off and reported the attack to the U.S. Park Police. He had made no attempt to steal her Walkman or her engagement ring. She believed that he planned to rape or kill her. Christy Wiegand, a 25-year-old lawyer, managed to fight off her attacker on July 1 as she jogged in the park. The U.S. Parks Police arrested Guandique 45 minutes later. Wiegand positively identified him as her attacker. During interrogations the next day, he admitted to having "bumped into" the two women. He was charged with assault and kidnapping in connection with the attack on Wiegand, but the D.C. police, which was investigating the Levy disappearance, did not hear about Guandique's arrest until three weeks later, on July 24. On February 8, 2002, he was sentenced to a 10-year term behind bars after pleading guilty to attacking the two women in Rock Creek Park.

After finding Levy's remains, police decided to re-interview Guandique. Both of his victims had been assaulted with a knife on isolated trails near steep inclines, the same type of terrain where Levy's remains were found. Guandique would approach the women from behind as they listened on headphones to a portable radio. Then he would attack them and try to drag them off the jogging trail and into the woods. Both women had escaped, but perhaps he had attacked Levy, too, with fatal consequences.

Police had first interviewed Guandique just after Levy disappeared, but he had passed a lie detector test. They did not meet with his victims or interview his family and friends using Spanish-speaking detectives, and they also failed to check his possessions for forensic evidence. Since police had used a Spanish-speaking interpreter for the polygraph test, detectives began to question the validity of their results. Then the investigation stalled again.

However, the impact of Condit's highly publicized romance with Levy did not stop. He filed lawsuits against several media outlets and journalists that had implicated him in her disappearance. A suit against the *National Enquirer* was settled, while one against *USA Today* was dismissed. Condit also sued *Vanity Fair* writer Dominick Dunne for slander to the tune of \$11 million. In 2005, Condit won an undisclosed



amount of money and an apology from Dunne, who had implicated him in the disappearance of Chandra Levy.

Condit moved to Arizona and bought two Baskin-Robbins ice cream outlets in Phoenix in 2005. However, that venture came to an end after the company sued him and his son for mismanagement. The ice cream maker claimed that the men had defaulted on their payment obligations for the two franchises. The court ruled in the company's favor during a one-day trial in 2007, and the Condits were ordered to pay \$44,431 to Baskin-Robbins for past fees and another estimated \$60,000 in lawyer's fees and interest.

## COLD CASE

Interest in the Levy investigation was heating up again. Bauder College, in Atlanta, Georgia, had set up a Cold Case Investigative Research Institute in 2004. The club of criminal justice students volunteered their time to try to solve cold cases as they trained to become investigators, victim advocates, and corrections officers. As they dug into the Chandra Levy case, they came to the conclusion that their prime suspect was already behind bars for two other assaults on women in the very park where Levy's remains had been found.

When Cathy Lanier became chief of the District of Columbia police in 2007, she set about revisiting some of her force's thousands of cold cases. She assigned three new detectives to the Levy investigation, and three federal prosecutors joined them in their quest to finally put the case to rest. They interviewed more than a dozen witnesses, two of whom claimed that Guandique had admitted that he killed Levy.

Although there was no physical evidence linking Guandique to the murder, U.S. attorney Jeffrey Taylor believed that the "cumulative weight" of circumstantial evidence pointed to convict. On March 3, 2009, Guandique was finally charged with first-degree murder in connection with Levy's killing. He was arraigned in May in the District of Columbia Superior Court on six counts, including first-degree murder, kidnapping, and attempted sexual abuse. He pleaded not guilty to all counts. Judge Geoffrey Alprin set a two-week jury trial for January 27, 2010, which has been moved to October 2010 pending further charges. Guandique is currently serving his 10-year sentence for his assaults on two other women at a federal prison in California. He is set for release on July 31, 2011, and he will face deportation back to El Salvador.

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Basketball star Bison Dele retired to travel the world on his catamaran. Getty Images.

# Murder on the High Seas: The Case of Basketball Player Bison Dele (2002)

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*The bodies of former basketball star Bison Dele, his girlfriend, and the skipper of their boat disappeared somewhere in the Pacific. They are believed to have been the victims of foul play, but their bodies have never been found. It is highly unlikely that this case will ever be closed, particularly since the police's main suspect is also dead.*

For Bison Dele there was more to life than basketball. He was born in Fresno, California, on April 6, 1969, the son of Eugene Williams of the 1950s singing group the Platters. His mother, Patricia Phillips, was a Blue Cross claims supervisor who raised her sons alone after she and their father separated when the boys were young. After playing college basketball for the University of Arizona Wildcats, the Orlando Magic picked him in the first round of the 1991 National Basketball Association draft. He spent eight seasons in the NBA with teams in Orlando, Denver, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit. Dele played on the Chicago Bulls' championship team in 1996 and 1997.

Although Dele earned millions of dollars, he sometimes used a skateboard to get to work. He nearly quit basketball in 1993 while suffering from clinical depression, but he made a comeback. In 1998, he changed his name from Brian Williams to Bison Dele to honor his Cherokee heritage and the first slave on his mother's side of the family. He also yearned for more from life than the basketball court. He played the trumpet, flew his own airplane, loved skydiving, and was well read.

One afternoon while Dele was playing with the Los Angeles Clippers, the team was in a Dallas hotel in between games. Clippers equipment manager Pete Serrano came downstairs in time to see a helicopter that Dele had rented was waiting in the parking lot. Serrano, Dele, a teammate, and the pilot took a five-hour flightseeing tour over Texas. "B wasn't going to spend the day in his room," Serrano later told a reporter for ESPN. "He needed to see things. He had to get out there." Over the years Dele traveled to, among other places, Pamplona in Spain, Cairo, Monaco, Havana, Mexico City, and Morocco.

Dele was playing for the Detroit Pistons in 1999 when he retired abruptly from basketball. He left behind more than \$30 million in salary and five years remaining in his seven-year contract. He was the team's highest-paid player. The 6-foot-10 inch, 260-pound player just did not have the desire to play anymore. He told a reporter that he probably would have been a better player if he had exhibited the same kind of passion for basketball as his father did for music.

After his retirement, Dele spent four months in Beirut, Lebanon, living with one of his closest friends. Ahmad ElHusseini was a Beirut businessman whom he had met while they were both students at the University of Arizona. Dele was a silent partner in Aqua Blue, his friend's Beirut-based water company. He also backpacked through Europe and ran with the bulls in Pamplona. His journey also took him to India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and New Zealand. He arrived in Australia and lived out of a truck while enjoying the Outback.

Dele's girlfriend was Serena Karlan, 30, a former New York City real estate agent from Boulder, Colorado. The couple had been dating since January 2002, after being introduced by Dele's friend and business manager Kevin Porter. On May 2, 2002, Dele, 33, and Karlan left Auckland, New Zealand, aboard the *Hukuna Matata*, Bison's 55-foot catamaran. *Hukuna Matata* means "No Worries" in Swahili. The boat was painted blue, green, and white.

Dele's older brother Miles Dabord, 35, a computer programmer who was fluent in German and Russian, joined the couple on the trip through the South Pacific. He had changed his name from Kevin Williams in honor of Miles Davis and an ancestor. Dabord was 6 foot 8 inches and weighed 260 pounds, but severe asthma kept him from athletic pursuits. Dele helped out his brother financially and gave him a car.

The trio, along with Frenchman and professional yacht captain Bertrand Saldo, 32, set sail for Tahiti. After that, they planned to head from Moorea, Tahiti, to Honolulu, Hawaii, via the Tuamotu and Marquesas islands. The United States was their final destination. Dele had been traveling outside the country for three years, since his retirement from basketball.

Once they arrived in Tahiti, Dele and Karlan apparently spent most of their time on the island of Moorea. The couple checked into the Sofitel La Ora hotel shortly after June 16, 2002. They stayed in the area for nearly three weeks, with Dele's boat coming and going from the tiny island. He swam and played Frisbee while Karlan relaxed in a lounge chair, reading. Throughout their trip through the South Pacific, Dele and Karlan checked in regularly with family and friends. Karlan contacted her mother at least once a week "like clockwork," her stepfather Scott Ohlgren later told a reporter. "This is a woman who is connected to her mom at the hip. It was very unusual that we didn't hear from her." Once a month Dele was in touch with his bank and Kevin Porter, his business manager in Michigan. In the last message that Karlan left

on an answering machine in July, she said that she was fine but it was sometimes difficult to make contact while travelling from Tahiti to Hawaii.

The *Hukuna Matata* apparently left Papeete, Tahiti's capital city, on July 4, and was scheduled to sail to Honolulu. Two days later, while the quartet was docked at Tahiti's Taina Marina, Saldo phoned a friend to say that they were soon leaving Tahiti for the Marquesas Islands. Karlan left a voice-mail message for her parents telling them that the trip was going well. It was the last time that anyone heard from them. The same day, a witness overheard the two brothers quarreling. The trio was last seen July 7, 2002, sailing near the tiny island of Maiao, west of Tahiti. Dabord was the last one to see Dele and the boat's two other passengers alive.

Dabord's girlfriend, Erica Weise, joined him on the Polynesian island of Moorea on July 8 and stayed for a week. It did not seem odd to her that Dele, Karlan, and Saldo were not with them. During his time in French Polynesia Dabord rented a scooter and took a boat tour to see sharks and manta rays. He docked the empty boat on July 18, hopped on an airplane home to California, and disappeared.

## DISAPPEARANCE AND SEARCH

Karlan's mother Gael Ohlgren began to worry in August when she had not heard from her daughter and only child in weeks. They tried to enlist the help of police and the public. They set up a Web site with information about Karlan and Dele, requesting help from the public with any information that could lead to the couple's whereabouts.

The Coast Guard and Tahiti Search and Rescue began looking for the *Hukuna Matata* on August 27, 2002. Divers in Tahiti searched for clues in the waters off the island of Moorea in a lagoon on the north coast. The missing trio had spent time there just before they disappeared. There were no signs of the boat, but Dabord turned up shortly afterwards thousands of miles away in the United States when Dele's business manager noticed that something was amiss with the former NBA player's finances.

Kevin Porter had met Dele in college and they became close friends. When Dele joined the NBA, Porter became his business manager. He would sign the checks that Dele approved to help out his brother. On August 31, 2002, he discovered that a personal check for \$152,000 had been drawn on Dele's account to purchase Golden Eagle coins from

a dealer in Phoenix, Arizona, called Certified Mint. The check had an address for a Mail Boxes Etc. franchise in Miami and the signature did not match the one that the bank had on file.

This set off alarm bells for Porter. Dele used certified checks or a credit card to pay bills; he had not written a personal check in 10 years. He also did not have a mailbox with Mail Boxes Etc. Porter phoned Certified Mint and learned that the purchaser had requested the coins be delivered to the mailbox. The owner of the shop provided the two telephone numbers that Dabord, posing as his brother, had given. When Porter phoned one of the numbers, the answering machine had Dele's usual message but it was his brother's voice.

The man pretending to be Bison Dele phoned Certified Mint on September 3 and said that he would come pick up the coins in Phoenix two days later rather than having them mailed to the Miami address. Porter informed Phoenix police that something was amiss. Dele and Dabord's mother, Patricia Phillips, flew to Phoenix with Porter the following day. She told investigators in Phoenix that Dabord had been somewhat estranged from the family for about three years, but that he would return after one of his "get rich quick schemes" had failed. The bank notified the Phoenix police department that a possible forgery had occurred.

Dabord arrived at Certified Mint on the afternoon of September 5, 2002, and identified himself as Dele. He showed Bison's passport as proof. The Phoenix police took him into custody. He was in possession of Bison's passport and two credit cards. Dabord told police that Dele had authorized the transaction, and he was released that evening without police filing any charges. When Dabord left the police station, Porter was waiting. He questioned him for hours about the fate of Dele, Karlan, and Saldo. The discussion ended at Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport. According to an interview that Porter granted ESPN, when Porter insisted that Dabord divulge the whereabouts of the missing trio, Dabord allegedly said, "We're in a state that carries the death penalty. I'm flying to a state [California] that carries the death penalty. In order for me to tell you anything I have to be in Mexico." Then Dabord boarded a plane to Palo Alto, California, just after 5:30 AM on September 6, 2002, and disappeared again.

The same day that Dabord was questioned by Phoenix police, a friend of Captain Saldo found the *Hukuna Matata* docked in the port of Taravao on the east coast of Tahiti. A pair of French and American flags that had faded from the sun were hanging from its mast. However, the boat



had been repainted and renamed the *Aria Bella*. There was no sign of Dele, Karlan, and Saldo. French authorities suspected foul play; they believed that Dabord had killed the trio and tossed the bodies overboard.

## ARREST WARRANT

On September 6, the Federal Bureau of Investigation issued an arrest warrant for Dabord for identity theft and forgery. Agents searched for him in Mexico. Officials from the FBI in San Francisco also sent a team of 13 forensics experts to Tahiti to investigate the disappearance of Dele, Karlan, and Saldo and search their boat for clues as to their fate. The FBI later learned that Dabord had his brother's checking account statements forwarded to the two mailboxes he had rented. He also purchased a cellphone in Dele's name and apparently planned to buy a business in Belize in Dele's name. The FBI believed that he was planning to assume his famous brother's identity.

Dabord's former girlfriend Erica Weise was listed as the boat's primary emergency contact. Authorities got in touch with her, and she told the FBI and the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department what she had learned from Dabord while driving him from Northern California to the Mexican border. He told her that there had been a scuffle aboard the yacht between Dabord and Dele. Dabord told Weise that Karlan was accidentally punched during an onboard fistfight between the two brothers. She fell, hit her head, and died. The captain wanted to radio authorities about Karlan's death, and Dabord claimed that Dele killed Saldo with a wrench to stop him. Then he threatened Dabord, who grabbed his brother's handgun and shot him in self-defense.

Based on that information, Tahiti officials turned the disappearance of the three people into a murder investigation. French investigators believed that Dabord killed his three companions in a struggle aboard the boat on July 7, 2002. FBI agents inspecting the abandoned yacht the following week found two small traces of blood and gunpowder residue from a large-caliber weapon, but no bodies. There was little doubt in the mind of Michel Marotte, the chief prosecutor for the territory of French Polynesia, that Dele, Karlan, and Saldo had been killed.

Dabord had placed a satellite telephone call from the catamaran, which authorities believe occurred after the death of his companions aboard the *Hukuna Matata*. FBI officials tracked down the recipient of the call, who lived in the South Pacific. The person was questioned in an effort to uncover more clues as to what happened aboard the boat,

but the person, whom police never identified, was reluctant to discuss the matter with authorities.

Investigators hoped that calls made from the satellite phone would help them determine the boat's location when the captain and his passengers went missing. They believed that the bodies were probably tossed overboard into the deep, shark-infested waters of the South Pacific near the tiny Polynesian island of Maiao. "We presume that the bodies of these people must be in the sea—the ocean—and will probably never be found," prosecutor Marotte said at the time. In the area where they disappeared, the water was almost 10,000 feet deep. The likelihood of finding the bodies was remote.

More than 10 weeks after the trio went missing authorities all but gave up hope of finding their bodies. They decided to concentrate their investigation on examining the boat and questioning anyone who could shed some light on just what happened aboard the *Hukuna Matata*. They dismantled parts of Dele's boat at the Tahiti port of Taravao to probe it with a metal detector, looking for bullets. The locals were stunned by the turn of events and the busloads of investigators who arrived to examine the boat. Nobody in Tahiti had realized that three people were missing—and murders there were rare.

The one person who could provide answers about what had transpired aboard the boat had fled to Tijuana, Mexico. Mexican police found some of his clothes in a hotel room there, but no sign of Dabord. After a warrant for his arrest was issued, he phoned his mother Patricia Phillips at home in Santa Monica, California, and left a message on her answering machine. He was threatening to commit suicide. "No one will believe me when I tell them what happened," he reportedly said. It would be the last time that Phillips heard her eldest son's voice.

Just over a week after an arrest warrant was issued for Dabord, a man was found comatose and without identification on a street in Tijuana. He was brought over the Mexico-California border to Scripps Memorial Hospital near San Diego and admitted as a John Doe. He was barely clinging to life and was placed on life support in the intensive care unit. Over the following days, the man's condition remained the same. Hospital officials contacted the Chula Vista Police Department to try to determine the man's identity. They wanted to inform his family where he was. Police fingerprinted the patient and learned on September 19—five days after he was found—that he was Miles Dabord, also known as Kevin Williams. They also discovered that he was wanted by the FBI. The two-week intensive manhunt for him was over.

Dabord was not facing any charges in connection with the disappearances of the other passengers aboard the *Hukuna Matata*, but police placed the unconscious man under arrest on a fraud charge and for allegedly fleeing arrest on that charge. If he regained consciousness, they wanted to question him about the events that occurred on his younger brother's boat. He would also be extradited to Phoenix to face fraud charges in connection with impersonating Bison Dele. According to the brothers' mother, Dabord went into a coma after he overdosed on insulin and failed to take his asthma medication.

A week after the Chula Vista Police Department identified Dabord, it became apparent that police would never find out what happened aboard the *Hukuna Matata* from the only survivor. Doctors told his mother that Dabord had suffered significant brain damage and there was no hope of him coming out of his coma. Life support was the only thing keeping him alive. Phillips brought two aunts, four cousins, and a friend to the hospital to pray by her son's bedside. One of the cousins, the Reverend Eugene Marzette, led the prayer service. Then she asked doctors to disconnect the life support machines that were keeping Dabord alive. In a desire to shield him and her family in his final moments, Phillips did not tell reporters at what moment she planned to have him unhooked from the respirator. "I don't want a media circus around us on the day my son's life ends," she later explained to a reporter.

Dabord died at Scripps Memorial Hospital during the evening on September 27, 2002. An autopsy and toxicology tests indicated that he had overdosed on Valium. His remains were cremated and Patricia Phillips held a private memorial service for her two sons on October 12, 2002, at Trinity Baptist Church in West Los Angeles. A tangible part of her sons stayed with her. One memory box held Dabord's ashes, and the other, for Dele, contained pictures, mementos, and a stone from Tahiti. But the questions still remain. Did Dabord kill his travel companions? What really happened that led an idyllic South Pacific holiday to turn deadly for four people? The secret remains buried with Dabord and in Dele, Karlan, and Saldo's watery grave.

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# **The Collar Bomber: The Death of Brian Wells (2003)**

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*Six years after pizza deliveryman Brian Wells died when a bomb around his neck blew up, a man went to jail in connection with the bank robbery that was at the center of this case. A second person is set to stand trial.*

Forty-six-year-old Brian Douglas Wells did not like to draw attention to himself. He once removed the hubcaps from his car because he thought that they looked “too flashy.” He was so timid that he sometimes hesitated to walk into the Erie Postal Center near where he worked if there were already customers inside. The quiet, shy, even-tempered man lived modestly in a small, rented A-frame white cottage with three cats that were all called “Kitty.” He was from a family of seven children and had dropped out of high school at the age of 16. He got along well with his co-workers and neighbors, but had few close friends, if any. He shared Sunday steak dinners with his mother. He enjoyed listening to CDs, sometimes rented movies to watch, and watched *Survivor*, his favorite television show. He only made a few hundred dollars a week at his job, but he was happy with his lot in life. A friend lent him money to buy a new car, a green Geo Metro, and Wells made regular payments until he was finally able to finish paying back the loan in August 2003.

Wells worked at Mama Mia’s Pizza-Ria on Peach Street in Erie, Pennsylvania, delivering pizza. This blue-collar town lay between Cleveland, Ohio, and Buffalo, New York. The city of about 100,000 people sat on the southern shore of Lake Erie in northwestern Pennsylvania. Wells never missed a day of work. The restaurant only had four tables. While waiting to make his next delivery, he often sat and did a crossword puzzle or read the newspaper, but he refused to take any food in the pizza parlor whenever he was hungry. He believed that it was not right to take something that did not belong to him.

On August 28, 2003, Wells picked up the *Erie Times-News* from a newspaper box as he did every morning and waved to a neighbor. At 10:30 AM, he climbed into his green Geo Metro and drove to work. About three hours later, toward the end of the lunch rush, a man phoned Mama Mia at about 1:30 PM and ordered two small sausage and pepperoni pizzas. He requested that they be delivered to 8631 Peach Street at what was described as a construction site about three miles away. Wells drove along Peach Street past a shopping center with a branch of the PNC Bank inside. A blue and white sign marked the dirt road to secluded woods and a deserted location, except for satellite-television

dishes and a broadcast transmission tower. Nearby was a small brick building that often stood empty.

## HOLDUP

At about 2:30 PM, Wells entered a nearby PNC Bank branch in Summit Towne Center on upper Peach Street. He was wearing a large t-shirt that hid a bomb pressing against his chest and a triple-banded metal collar with a locking mechanism around his neck. He held what appeared to be a cane. He waited patiently in line for his turn. Then he walked over to a teller's window and handed her a four-page, handwritten note demanding \$250,000. He lifted his shirt to show that he had a ticking bomb underneath. She gave him a plastic garbage bag containing \$8,700. He calmly left the bank and climbed into his car.

Then he drove to the parking lot of a McDonald's Restaurant and rummaged around in a flowerbed. He found two more notes under a rock. He got back into his car to drive to his next destination. By then, someone inside the bank had pressed a silent alarm alerting police about the holdup. Then a witness called emergency dispatchers at 2:38 PM to say that Wells had something wrapped around his neck—possibly a bomb.

Pennsylvania State troopers surrounded Wells in the parking lot of Eyeglass World moments later with their guns drawn. They discovered that he appeared to be on some type of scavenger hunt and was on his way to his next location when they intercepted him. Upon searching his vehicle, officers found a five-page note but no sign of the two pizzas that he had been sent out to deliver.

The state troopers ordered him to step out of his car and handcuffed his hands behind his back. They were about to place him inside a squad car when he told them that someone had locked a bomb around his neck and forced him to rob the bank. "He pulled a key out and started a timer," Wells told them. "I heard the thing ticking when he did it. . . . It's gonna go off. I don't have much time." He never explained to police to whom he was referring. They evacuated the area. Five customers and seven employees inside Eyeglass World went to the back of the store and hid under the desks. Police sought refuge behind their vehicles while they waited for the bomb squad to arrive.

Television news cameras from WJET rolled with live coverage as the scene unfolded. While police waited for the bomb squad, Wells sat on the ground by himself rocking back and forth with one leg crossed over

the other. “Why isn’t nobody trying to come get this thing off me?” he shouted to officers hiding behind their squad cars for cover. “It’s going to go off. I’m not lying. Did you call my boss? I’m not doing this. This isn’t me.” He was arching his back when the bomb went off at 3:18 PM and blew a fatal hole the size of a postcard in his chest. He died instantly, 40 minutes after 911 received the first call about the bank robbery. Federal Bureau of Investigation special agent Robert Rudge was just a few feet away when the bomb blew up.

The four-member bomb squad arrived three minutes later—14 minutes after they had been called. They searched the car belonging to Wells. Inside, they found a bag of cash and a homemade cane-shaped gun, along with a nine-page handwritten note containing instructions. The letter told Wells how to conduct the robbery. “MOST IMPORTANT RULE! Do not radio, phone, or contact anyone,” the note said. “Alerting authorities, your company, or anyone else will bring your death. If we spot police vehicles or aircraft, you will be killed.” It also explained what to do with the money from the bank heist.

After the holdup, Wells was to go to several different locations and perform a series of tasks. He would be “destroyed” if he didn’t complete the mission. The note included a drawing of a McDonald’s sign and a road map. Once he had finished the scavenger hunt, he would be able to disarm the bomb around his neck. According to a coroner’s report released six months later, Wells had only 55 minutes to rob the bank and complete the tasks to disarm the bomb.

Police believed that the collar bomb was placed around Wells’s neck while he was in an isolated clearing in the woods. They just were not sure if he was a willing participant or not. Was he an innocent victim who was forced to commit the bank robbery? If he was coerced, perhaps he thought that he was under surveillance or was too scared to alert authorities and ask for help. If he chose to be involved, did he have any accomplices or was he acting alone? Family, friends, and neighbors could not believe that the mild-mannered Wells could have chosen to be involved. They believed that he was forced or duped. In fact, one neighbor said that Wells was looking forward to a family gathering, which was to be held the weekend after the robbery.

## **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

The FBI; the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Pennsylvania State Police; and the Erie Police Department

were part of the investigation into the baffling crime. They interviewed and re-interviewed Wells's co-workers and family members. They also tried to trace where the metal collar and bomb-making materials came from. In a bid for answers, police officials released photographs of the triple-banded metal collar on September 2, 2003. It had four keyholes. They hoped that someone would recognize the device and provide leads. Despite the hundreds of calls, police were no closer to solving the mystery.

A white man with shaggy hair was seen coming out of a wooded area near the bank around the time of the robbery. He was wearing a Pittsburgh Steelers jersey and was spotted near a Country Fair store about 10 minutes after Wells was killed. Another man was spotted running near the exit of a local freeway, where Wells was supposed to make a stop during his getaway. Police were not sure if they were involved with the robbery and collar bombing; they just wanted to question them. More than three weeks later, they released a photograph on September 25 of the odd-looking weapon they had found in Wells's car. They also offered a \$50,000 reward for information about the case.

About six months later, in February 2004, Erie County coroner Lyell Cook ruled that Wells's death was a homicide, but investigators had not yet ruled out whether Wells had willingly participated in the crime or was coerced. They released a copy of the nine-page note they had found in his car after the bomb went off in the hope that someone would recognize the handwriting. Janet Ponsford told police that the handwriting looked like that of her ex-husband, Floyd J. Stockton, who was wanted in Washington State in connection with the rape of a mentally disabled woman.

At the time of the Erie bank robbery, Stockton had been staying with substitute teacher and handyman William Rothstein, who lived near the area where Wells made his final pizza delivery. On September 20, 2003, Rothstein had contacted Pennsylvania State police and told them that he had hidden a man's body in his freezer to help out the friend who had committed the murder.

Rothstein's former fiancée, Marjorie Diehl-Armstrong, had killed her boyfriend, James D. Roden, with two shotgun blasts while he slept. She gave Rothstein \$2,000 to help her get rid of the body, clean up her apartment, and dispose of the weapon. He went to her house and wrapped Roden's body in a tarp. Then he brought the body to his house and lifted it into his freezer. On September 20, Diehl-Armstrong decided that it was time to get rid of her boyfriend's body. She wanted to use an ice-crusher



to dismember his body. Alarmed by Diehl-Armstrong's plans, Rothstein called the police.

It was not the first time that Diehl-Armstrong had shot a man. In 1984, she was charged with the fatal shooting of her boyfriend Robert Thomas. She was acquitted of homicide in 1988, after testifying that she had shot him in self-defense after enduring physical and sexual abuse. She was given probation for carrying a firearm without a license. According to Rothstein, Diehl-Armstrong killed Roden on or about August 13, 2003, to keep him quiet about the bank robbery planned for two weeks later.

On August 28, 2003, a retired university professor was driving south on Interstate highway 79 near the site of the bank heist at about 1:40 PM. He saw a woman driving a gold-colored car down the wrong side of the road. It was not until three weeks later that Tom Sedwick, a retired faculty member from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, realized the woman was Diehl-Armstrong. An investigation into her connection with the Wells case was delayed after a court appearance in the Roden case raised questions about her competency to stand trial. From March 2004 to March 2005, she underwent psychiatric treatment at Mayview State Hospital, near Pittsburgh.

In 2005 Diehl-Armstrong pleaded guilty to killing Roden and was sentenced to up to 20 years in prison. She also claimed that she had suffered from mental illness. Her life had taken a much different turn since she was the valedictorian of her high school class. She suffered from a number of severe mental health issues, including bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Rothstein was charged with evidence tampering in connection with the Roden case, but he died of cancer on July 30, 2004. Right up until his death, he maintained that he had nothing to do with the collar bombing and the death of Brian Wells.

The FBI was finally able to begin questioning Diehl-Armstrong in connection with the Wells case in May 2006, after she had been declared fit to stand trial and was convicted of Roden's murder. By then, FBI and ATF agents had interviewed her fishing buddy Kenneth E. Barnes six times in 2005 and once again in 2006. They also searched his home for evidence of bomb-making equipment. A U.S. grand jury finally indicted Diehl-Armstrong and Barnes in connection with the case in July 2007. They were both charged with bank robbery, conspiracy, and a firearms count related to the bomb. By then, Diehl-Armstrong was behind bars for Roden's murder, and television repairman Barnes, who was reportedly good at fixing electronic devices, was jailed on drug charges. Both pleaded not guilty in U.S. District court in Erie, Pennsylvania.

According to the prosecutor, Wells was involved in the crime but had had a limited role while the robbery plot was being planned. She was not sure why he had chosen to participate or whether he knew that the bomb he would be carrying was real. Diehl-Armstrong and Barnes had watched from across the street as Wells held up the bank. She had planned the robbery as part of a desire to exact revenge on her father, Harold Diehl, over a dispute involving her late mother's estate. She wanted to use the robbery to raise money to pay Barnes \$200,000 to kill her father. A federal judge ruled that Diehl-Armstrong was mentally unfit to stand trial.

## SUSPECTS

In September 2008, Barnes changed his plea to guilty to conspiracy and a charge of aiding and abetting. In exchange for the plea bargain, he agreed to testify against Diehl-Armstrong and cooperate with police. According to his testimony, Wells was involved in the robbery plot and had his neck measured for what he believed would be a fake bomb. The day of the robbery, he refused to wear the collar bomb when he realized that it was real. He was coerced to change his mind when another conspirator fired a single gunshot to scare him. They used a real bomb to ensure that Wells would hand over the money after the robbery. Barnes said that his role was to be a lookout at the bank. He also offered to build a pipe bomb with a timing device. Rothstein apparently called in the phony order to Mama Mia Pizza-Ria to bring Wells to the dead-end road where he would put on the collar bomb.

Barnes was sentenced to 45 years in federal prison in December 2008. Nine months later, in September 2009, Diehl-Armstrong was found competent to stand trial in connection with the case.

## FURTHER READING

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## About the Author

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