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MYSTERY OF 14-YEAR-OLD MARY PHAGAN'S TRAGIC END ADDS ONE TO LONG LIST OF ATLANTA'S UNSOLVED CRIMES

BY GORDON NOEL HURTEL.

The mystery surrounding the murder of Mary Phagan, the young factory girl who met a tragic and a terrible death in the heart of a city whose streets were thronged with holiday crowds, may add another chapter to Atlanta's record of unsolved and unpunished crimes.

Can such things be? is asked. Can murder, red-handed, find a victim in the midst of a populous city when the sun is smiling in God's skies of blue and where the protecting power of the law and the vengeance of justice are near, and the criminal go uncaught and the crime unpunished?

Historical annals show that there have been, ever since the city was a village, murder mysteries that remain unsolved, despite the tireless efforts of human ingenuity to bring the murderers to justice.

Murder Will Not Always Out.

That "murder will not always out" is shown by the tragedies that are here recited, for of tragedies that left unfulfilled the mandate of Jehovah "who sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed," Atlanta has had its full quota. Nor is this city more flecked with the blood of unavenged victims than other communities. Ever since the first murder of the world when only the fratricide's God knew of the crime, punishment has come alone from some power greater than that of man.

The stories here recorded of "Atlanta's Murder Mysteries" had all the elements of boldness and brutality to defy the skill of Gaborin's "LeCoo" or Conan Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes." Many clues were followed up and arrests were made. In some of the cases the officers were positive they had caught the guilty criminals, as the evidence appeared convincing and conclusive, but in the end the mystery still remained a mystery.

The cases recited are not given to rake up blood-stained ashes of the past, but to point out the unerring truth that murder can go unwhipped of justice, and that if the grave of Mary Phagan must forever hide the secret of her tragic death, it will not be the only rain-washed mound that holds a victim of unpunished crime.

The First Murder Mystery.

In 1856, when Atlanta had a population of only 7,000 people, the first murder mystery went on record. In that year Amos Hammond, a young man who belonged to one of the leading families, was foully murdered and in order to conceal the crime the murderers had carried the body to the yards of the Macon and Western railroad in the dead of night and placed it across the tracks. An incoming train mangled the body, but did not destroy the evidence of murder, for the bullet-hole through the brain was detected by physicians.

Who killed Amos Hammond, and why he was murdered was a mystery. No cause could be assigned for the deed, and despite every effort of the officers of the law the guilty parties could not be found.

The Defoor Double Murder.

Possibly the greatest murder mystery that ever shocked the people of this community and baffled the skill of detectives was that which surrounded the brutal slaying of the Defoors. Martin Defoor and his wife, Susan, an elderly couple, lived in a two-story house on the banks of the Chattahoochee river at what was known as Defoors ferry. The place was seven miles from Atlanta and only a few hundred yards from where the trolley railroad bridge is now located. The couple had lived there in peace since 1853. They had not an enemy in the world.

On Saturday night, July 26, 1879, some person or persons entered the house by breaking open a door on the lower floor and used an ax to murder both Defoor and his wife. Their heads were crushed and almost severed from their bodies. As no articles of value were missing from the house robbery could not have been the cause.

Detectives worked long on the case, bloodhounds were used to track the murderer, and several arrests were made; but all to no avail, and the murder remained a mystery.

The Defoors lived in the first house that was ever built in Fulton county. It was a two-story structure, and was destroyed only a few years ago. A full account appeared in The Atlanta made; but all to no avail, and the following words were written by Henry W. Grady:

"Side by side they had walked down the checkered path which leads from youth to old age. Side by side they had sunk into that sweet slumber which none but the guiltless can know. Side by side they had passed down the dark valley, and side by side on this peaceful Sabbath morning their spirits are walking in that bright and better land where God hath said the red hand of murder shall be erased."

A Young Wife the Victim.

In 1885 there was in Atlanta a man of alleged wild habits and well known to the police. That man was Charlie Rose, and it was a common saying in those days, no matter what the offense was, that "Charlie Rose did it." He was never convicted and he always treated the charges against him and his arrests as a joke on the police. There was one bright spot in his checkered career. He had a beautiful young wife whom he idolized, and who worshiped him, wild and wayward though he may have been.

In 1884 there was in Atlanta a man. Then one night, on June 11, 1884, someone entered Charlie Rose's by shooting her through the head. She was found dead in her crimson bed, and there was never a clue by which the detectives could even point a finger of suspicion at man or woman.

Charlie Rose, with his spirit broken and the daredevil gone out of his life, disappeared from Atlanta and was never seen again.

Shot Down on the Street.

The "Bass murder" has long been referred to by the police of Atlanta as one of the most mysterious crimes that has ever been committed in the city. B. A. Bass was a prominent merchant with a large store on Peters street. He was a man of quiet manners, and had not an enemy in the world, so far as was known. He went back and forth to his business daily, beloved at home and honored and respected in commercial circles.

It was his custom to walk down Ivy street, every morning about daylight while going to his work. On the morning of August 30, 1895, he left home at his usual hour. It was about 4 o'clock in the morning, just as the early morning light was brightening the eastern skies and before the gas lamps had been extinguished. He was alone, and when he reached a point on Ivy street in the rear of where the Aragon hotel now stands two shots were fired by some unknown person hiding in a vacant lot, and Bass staggered and fell dead in the street.

There were, police investigations, plenty of them, and the detectives left nothing undone that could have ferreted out the crime, but after weeks and weeks of arduous work the "Bass murder" took its place in the list of "Atlanta's Murder Mysteries."

Three Policemen Were Victims.

A remarkable thing about Atlanta's mysterious murders is that three policemen were shot to death and no trace of the murderers ever found. Here were officers of the law whose duty it is to punish crime and solve crimes of mystery who were themselves the victims of murders that would not out.

On May 12, 1897, a wholesale liquor store on Wall street, opposite the union depot, had been closed and placed in the hands of a receiver, Policeman J. T. J. Ponder was the depot officer. He was a man of great courage, and there was no member of the force regarded with more esteem and respect. While patrolling his beat he discovered a light burning in the closed liquor store, and he knew that something was wrong. He stepped across the street, tried the front door and found it had been unlocked. He walked into the building, and what happened after that no person could ever tell, save that the policeman was next to be shot to death. His body was found in a few paces from the front door and a bullet had penetrated his brain. There were all sorts of theories, and three or four arrests were made, but the slayer of Officer Ponder was never found. Whether he fired upon a burglar and the burglar fired upon him, or whether some person wishing to interfere with the receiver killed Ponder when he was discovered, or whether the officer was murdered by someone in the alley in the rear of the building were questions that were raised, but never answered. The policeman had been murdered and justice did not avenge the crime.

R. L. Albert, a policeman, was waylaid and shot to death while he was walking on the Broad street bridge at daylight in the morning of July 17, 1897, but two months after Officer Ponder was killed. The mystery surrounding the assassination of Officer Albert was so complete that the detectives never even attempted to advance a theory. It could not have been that he was attacked by burglars; it could not have been that some enemy thus sought revenge, and it could not have been that he was trying to make an arrest, for what little evidence was secured contradicted any of these theories. It was a case at which officers of the law merely throw up their hands and said, "We don't know."

Thomas Carl Mills, another policeman, was waylaid and murdered on Whitehall street, at Turner's alley, some time during the night of August 5, 1898. He was found next morning in a dying condition with a bullet through his head, and died at the hospital without regaining consciousness, and without being able to make a statement. Mills had been on the police force only a few days, having served prior to that time as a stockade official. He was a bright, handsome young man, and had no enemies that his friends or relatives had ever heard of.

Choked to Death With Tongue.

Mrs. Mary Lilly, an aged woman, was found murdered in her home on West Hunter street, where she lived alone, on May 12, 1906. Around her neck was twisted a pair of iron tongs, the weapon having been used to choke her to death. Her relatives could assign no cause for the crime and the police found themselves utterly at a loss to secure a tangible clue. It was impossible for her to have committed suicide in the manner described, and the way in which the tongs had been used showed that a strong arm had twisted them about her throat.

Her relatives assisted the police in trying to solve the mystery and both time and money were spent in vain. Mrs. Lilly was assigned to her grave and her murderer went free.

A Triple Murder Mystery.

The boldest double murder that ever occurred in Atlanta, and one which was never avenged by the law, was that of W. H. Briley and his wife. The elderly couple had a store at 75 West Humphries street and their home was in a dwelling adjoining the store.

Late one Saturday night, probably about 11 o'clock, on March 26, 1899, while the couple were still in the store, some person entered and murdered them with a meat-ax and cheese knife which had been picked up from the counter. At the same time there was killed in the store Robert Wilkinson, a negro.

The murderer, after completing his triple crime, set the store afire and fled. Early Sunday morning the police entered the partially burned building and found the dead bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Briley and the negro. It was at first believed that the negro was one of the murderers and had been killed by Mr. Briley in the conflict, but later it was shown that the negro had gone to the store to make a purchase, and he had probably come upon the murderer, who killed him so that he could not tell what he had witnessed.

Not a thing in the store was stolen, not even the money in the cash drawer. A relative of the Brileys

was suspected, as the aged couple had some property, but this was a mere suspicion without any proof to substantiate it. Several negroes were arrested, but there was so little evidence against them that they were released on their own recognizance and were never tried. Months were spent on the case by the detectives, but the mystery of the triple murder was never solved.

The Case of Miss Kloeckler.

There are doubtless many people in Atlanta who remember the great mystery surrounding the death of Miss Sophio Kloeckler. Her dead body was found floating in the lake at Lakewood park on May 24, 1904. So mystifying was the affair that the coroner held two inquests with two separate juries, a thing that had never been done before.

Because the hand of the law could not be laid upon any person who was suspected of causing Miss Kloeckler's death there were those who tried to dismiss the case by making it one of self destruction, but there was too much evidence to prove that she did not commit suicide to let such a verdict stand. She was a beautiful young girl of an excellent family and there was not any possible reason in the world why she should wish to take her own life. When the coroner's first jury rendered a verdict leaving the case in doubt, a second jury was empaneled in order to satisfy a public demand for a more thorough investigation. The Constitution secured the services of a Pinkerton man and he, with the city detectives, worked diligently on the case for several weeks. There were many clues that were run down, but suspicion was never strong enough to warrant an arrest. The second coroner's jury did as the first had done, rendered a verdict of death from drowning with the cause unknown.

No one who knew Miss Kloeckler or who heard all the evidence in the case ever believed that she committed suicide. Her death was a mystery, probably one of the murder mysteries.

Murdered With a Club.

Early one morning on March 2, 1903, Mrs. J. Whittle, of 44 Bell street, arose from her bed and prepared for her daily work. Her husband was left lying in the bed. Some person entered the rear of her house and with a club beat out her brains just as she was about to leave the kitchen to step into the back yard to milk the cow. Her husband, hearing the noise of the assault, started to her assistance and was himself felled by the murderous club.

Mrs. Whittle died in a few hours at the hospital, while her husband recovered. He was unable to give the officers any clue and could not say whether the murderer was black or white. He knew of no person who could be called his enemy or who could have wished to take his life. There was no robbery, as not a thing in the house was touched. The murderer had simply stepped into the rear door, murdered the woman, attempted to murder the man and fled, never to be apprehended by the law.

A Watchman Assassinated.

W. H. Holland was a railroad watchman whose duties kept him in a small office at night in the W. & A. railroad yards. He was a quiet man in the humble walks of life who worked hard and attended to his own business.

On the night of April 8, 1910, some person shoved the muzzle of a shotgun through the window of Holland's office, fired one shot and blew off the top of his head.

An arrest was made and the man was tried on the theory that he had killed Holland because he was in love with Mrs. Holland, but after a thorough investigation by the court and a jury this theory was proved to be groundless and the prisoner was found not guilty. So the murder of Holland remained a mystery.

Waylaid on the Street.

On October 28, 1910, Pat Landers, a saloon keeper, was assassinated at night while he was walking on Walton street near the junction of Marietta street. He was shot to death and there was never a scintilla of evidence found that pointed to the murderer. Landers was a good citizen, and had never given anyone provocation for such a crime. A feature about the murder was that he was not robbed. The case was thoroughly investigated and had to take its place among the mysteries.

Were "Highlanders" at Work?

The "Highlanders," the Chinese secret order that is said to carry out the death sentences on those who betray its secret, is said to have been responsible for two of the mysterious murders in Atlanta.

On June 7, 1911, Wum Him, a Chinaman, was found dead in his laundry

shop in West End, with a cord about his neck that had strangled out his life. There was a probability of suicide, but this was never believed by the Chinese of Atlanta, who said they knew Wum Him to be a man in good circumstances and who had no thoughts of self destruction.

On December 15, 1912, Sing Kee was shot to death on Houston street. He had a laundry at 49 East Hunter street and had left his place of business that night to attend a meeting of Chinamen on Houston street. He was shot through the head and died instantly.

Neither of the mysterious deaths of the two Chinamen was ever solved. **The Body Was Carried Off.**

Now comes the most mysterious of all the mystery murders that have been recorded in the city. About four teen years ago W. B. Gathright, a shoemaker on Decatur street, was murdered while he slept in bed in a room in the rear of his shop. He was a quiet, inoffensive old man who had never had so much as a cross word with a neighbor. The police found a bloody bed where he had slept and in the room there was every indication of a foul murder; but the body was not there and it was believed that it had been carried off in a wagon. Some

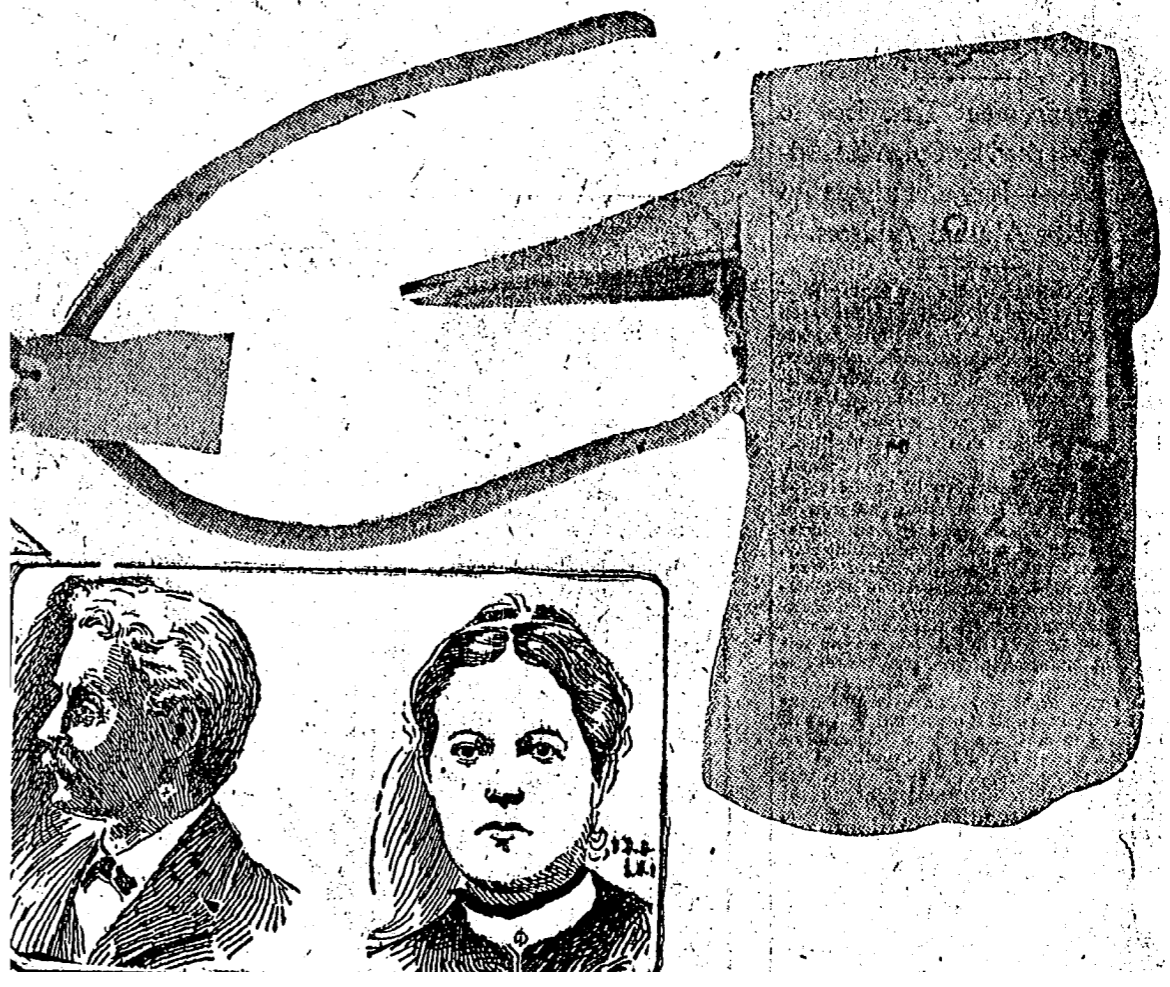
years afterwards a skeleton was found in a box in a ravine fifty miles from Atlanta and near Gainesville, Ga., and there were many who believed it was the remains of old man Gathright, but this was never proven. The Gathright murder was a great mystery because there had not been even a body left upon which the coroner could hold an inquest.

Of very recent date is the murder of J. A. Appelbaum, which occurred on February 25, 1913, in a hotel in the business center of the city. So very recent is this crime that the facts are still too fresh in the minds of the public to require recital here. It is true that Mrs. Appelbaum was charged with the murder, but after a full and fair trial a jury exonerated her and that left the murder still a mystery.

There were other murder mysteries, mostly negroes, and some of which

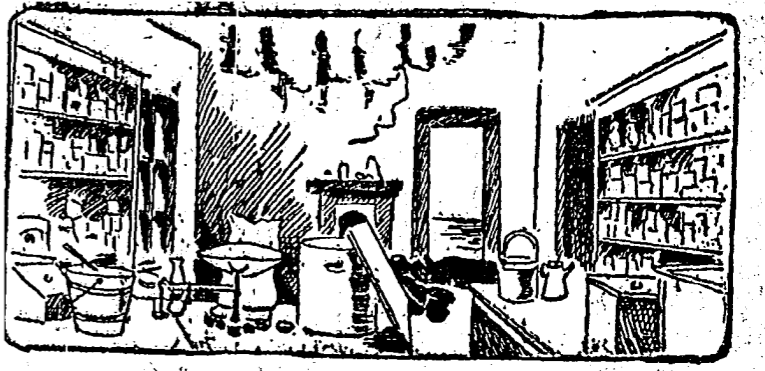
were of recent date, charged to "Jael the Ripper."

These stories of crime and mystery only go to show, as stated, that murder will not always out, and that the case of Mary Phagan may be added to the list of murders that must forever remain unsolved.



Some of the Principals and Instruments of Death in the Murder Mysteries of Atlanta.

Mary Phagan, whose recent tragic death may add another chapter to the mysterious murders committed in the city—The tongs with which Mrs. Mary Lilly was strangled to death on May 12, 1906—The ax with which the Defoors were murdered on June 26, 1879—Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Briley, who were murdered in their store on March 26, 1898.



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