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A COLD CASE IN JAFFERY: A 1918 MURDER



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A spy? A rival? A spurned lover? A jealous neighbor?

City Banker Charles Rich was the easiest person to blame. The morning after Dr. William K. Dean was murdered outside his Jaffrey farmhouse, Rich was seen around town with a black-eye. The banker blamed a kick to the head by his horse for the injury. He claimed the horse just grazed his face, avoiding serious damage. Some citizens of Jaffrey, New Hampshire weren't convinced.

The Murder

"Billy is in deep water," Mrs. Dean said to officials after she called authorities when she couldn't find her husband. William K. Dean, 63, was murdered the night of Aug. 13, 1918, in Jaffrey, New Hampshire. His body was found the next morning in a rainwater cistern or well about 200 yards from the house he lived in with his wife, Mary.

The Keene Evening Sentinel wrote a story describing his body the day it was found. "His hands bound, his scalp battered from some blunt instrument, burlap and blankets tied over his head, and a stone weighing about 20 pounds attached."

Photographs showed his face was badly beaten and bruised. His arms and legs were still bound the morning after he was murdered, a rope still tied around his neck. Lacerations were still visible on his face and scalp when he was put in his casket and laid to rest.

The Sentinel followed up its story a few days later with more details, reporting Mrs. Dean said her husband went out the night he was murdered to milk the cows. She said he took his milking pail, which was never found at the crime scene. It was also reported by a friend that Dr. Dean received a threatening letter sometime before he was killed,

but traces of the letter was never found, according to investigators. Before the wonders of forensic science made famous in CSI, the police had little evidence aside from the body.

Eight months later, The Cheshire County Grand Jury gave a verdict. William K. Dean was, "murdered by person or persons unknown," according to court documents transcribed, edited and published by Bean.

While the crime remains an unsolved mystery, theories and suspects persist to this day.

The Aftermath

What is clear is that the murder of a prominent doctor, a gentleman farmer, a married man who moved to bucolic southwestern New Hampshire for his retirement rocked the town of Jaffrey. According to Mark Bean, author of *The Murder of William K. Dean: By person or persons unknown*, "Neighbors stopped talking to each other. Catholics wouldn't walk on the same side of the street as Protestants. Workers in the mills and factories suspected their bosses were involved in a cover-up conspiracy. Everyone was frustrated and angry that answers were not forthcoming."



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JAFFERY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Citizens were demanding answers from the government and wanted the murder solved, especially if it involved spy activity, as some suggested. Ever since the United States became involved in WWI citizens became fearful of German spies, especially in the mountainous regions of the Northeast. Their fears were well-founded given that citizens in Jaffrey, Keene, Peterborough and surrounding areas reported flashing lights from Mt. Monadnock. Some people suggested these flashes were other German spies trying to communicate with each other.

“Mt. Monadnock was visible for great distances. Some people said it was the first point of land a ship would see coming into Boston harbor,” Margaret Bean said at the Amos Fortune Forum, “The Dean Murder Mystery” in 1989.

“Lots of responsible people were sure they saw signal lights, but there were others who wouldn’t take them seriously,” she said.

Rumors had been swirling around Jaffrey weeks prior to the murder that someone living on Dean’s property was a German spy. A “Mr. Colfelt” had come to Jaffrey and rented a house from Dean on his property, upon a recommendation from Rich.

Suspects

As a child, Dr. Dean was a playmate with the Prince of Siam [now Thailand]. His father, Rev. William Dean was a missionary to China and the family spent years in Siam.

Dean was a retired doctor by the time he made Jaffrey his home. He and his wife bought an old farm in town and soon after built a house on the property. They were married for 38 years when he was killed and had no children. At first, police suspected Mrs. Dean of the murder. Margaret Bean, a historian and author who is an expert on the Dean murder, said William was a “ladies man” and some people in town suspected his wife was jealous.

This idea was quickly dropped, as she had become very sick before her husband was murdered. In fact, she died just over a year after he did. The police decided she was not physically capable of such a crime. The documents provided in the case indicate, there is no way a sick old woman could carry her 200 pound husband the length of two football fields and dump him into a well with a weight attached.

Mrs. Dean died just over a year after he husband was murdered.

Rich was the next, most obvious suspect. He was born in Vermont and later graduated from M.I.T. He taught school in New Hampshire before becoming a banker.

The huge bruise on his face made people question his involvement and the fact that Rich was Protestant and Dean was Catholic only added to the speculation. The successful businessman was not well-liked in town, so he was an easy target. According to Margaret Bean, however, Rich and Dean were great friends in the past and played golf together regularly.

A mysterious "Mr. Colfelt" was the next suspect who was introduced to Dean by Rich in 1917. Laurence Colfelt and his wife rented a house in Jaffrey in 1916, not too far from the Dean's farm. Colfelt never worked and never mixed with the town much. He and his wife were always very distant from town. The Colfelts left, but came back later that year and rented a house from Dean.

At a forum in 1989, Margaret Bean said, "They came in October [1917] and stayed through the winter. That was strange. Lots of people came in the summer, but who would stay through a New Hampshire winter?"

Then, in June of 1918, the Colfelts abruptly left Jaffrey. Rumors were moving around town that Dr. Dean gave Colfelt 24 hours to get off the property. This was never confirmed by the doctor himself, but Dr. Dean did tell some of his close friends that he didn't feel right having Colfelt on his property just sitting around in a time of war. Colfelt rarely left his property and never worked while he was living at the Dean's.

Bean described Colfelt's rental on Dean's property as, "The house had a beautiful view of the mountains. Good place to send signals from."

After the Colfelts left Dr. Dean's house they moved to Temple, New Hampshire. Colfelt was never heard from in Jaffrey again.

The End

The New York Times added to the speculation of espionage over a year after the murder when they reported the visits of former German Ambassador Count von Bernstorff. Bert Ford, an investigator for the Boston American, reported that Bernstorff and other Germans held mysterious meetings in the region in the fall of 1916. Bernstorff was also supposedly present on a trip with Charles Bean

marking trails in the area. Bernstorff and other Germans hired Bean to help them procure maps and mark trails, “only after he assured the men that he did not speak German,” the New York Times reported. Perhaps Bernstorff was working with Mr. Colfelt.

Perhaps they were sending signals to German soldiers, planning landing spots on the tops of some of New Hampshire’s highest mountains. Perhaps Dr. Dean found out about Mr. Colfelt and Ambassador Bernstorff’s spying activities and plans. That is why he evicted him from his property so quickly. If this was the case, of course Dean had die. He knew too much.

Maybe Mrs. Dean wasn’t as sick as she let on.

Maybe she killed her husband after being fed up with his “ladies man” tendencies, as described by Bean. Why did she say “Billy is in deep water,” when she hadn’t found his body yet?

Maybe it was Rich after all. Nearly a century later, the murder of Dean still hasn’t been solved. But, like most good mysteries, anything is possible.

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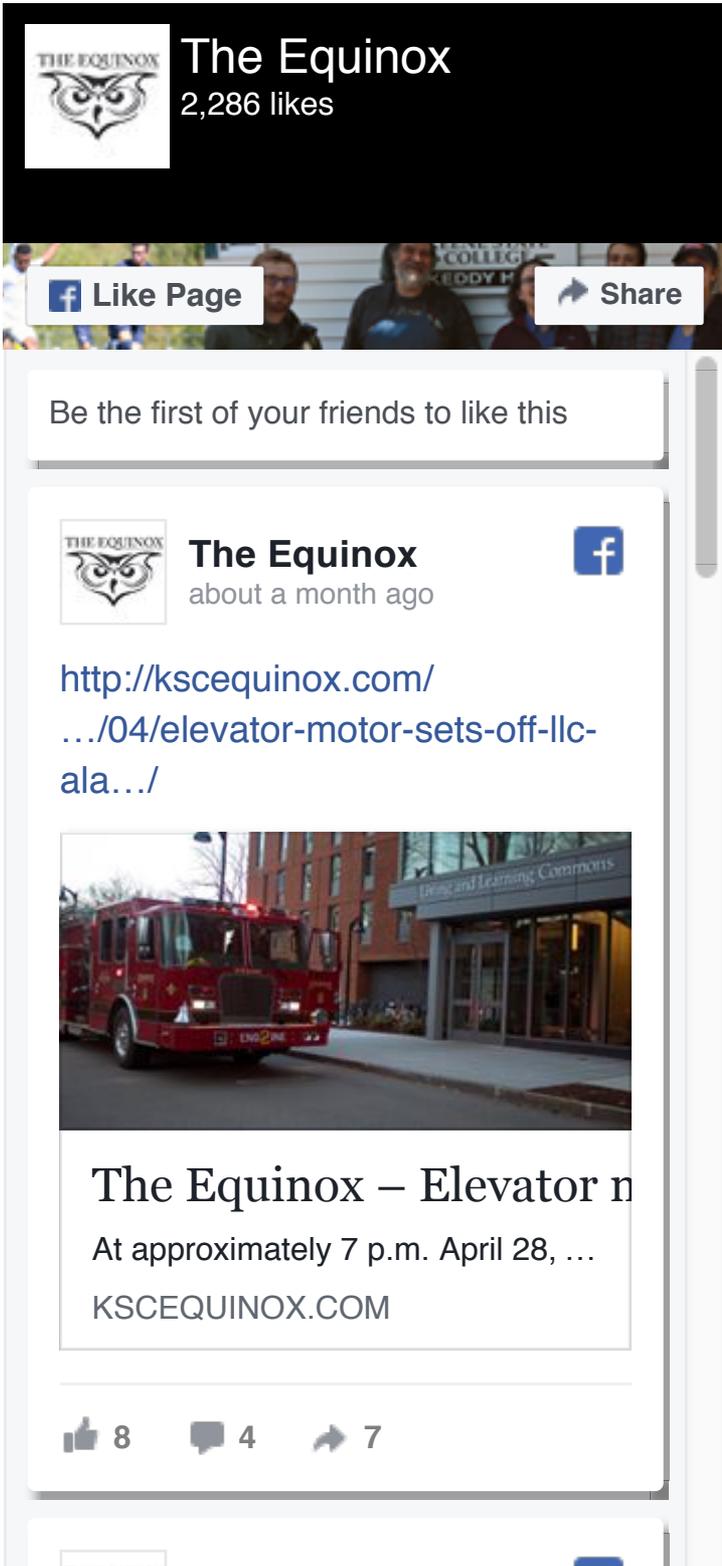
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