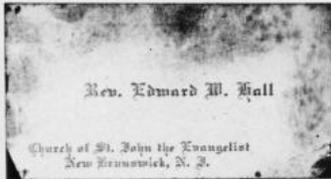


September 14, 1922, Edward Wheeler Hall and Eleanor Reinhardt Mills (picture to right) lay on their backs, side by side, she with a scarf draped over her neck, his face partly covered by a Panama hat. Love letters from Mrs. Mills to the Reverend Mr. Hall were strewn about the bodies; and the minister's calling card (picture below) with his name was carefully propped up against his lifeless foot. The forty-one-year-old minister had been shot once in the head; and the thirty-four-year-old soprano had three bullets in her skull. The woman's throat, moreover, had been slashed with such violence that the head was nearly severed. An autopsy four years later in 1926 on the exhumed body of Eleanor Mills: the tongue and vocal chords of the choir singer had been cut out and removed. The bodies were found near the notorious lovers' lane, which was in Somerset County



Frances Hall was seven years older than Edward; and when the pair married in 1911 she was thirty-seven and he was thirty. Some assumed at the time of their marriage that the groom had his eye on money and status, and perhaps it was so. Edward assumed the responsibility of monitoring the weekly allowance for Frances' older brother Willie, who was not employed.

September 16, the newspaper reporters and a number of private citizens made their way to the site, where they trampled the ground and began to strip the bark of the crab apple tree for souvenirs.

Quick to shut the media down and make a quick arrest, they arrested Clifford Hayes. Soon, it was clear that only the Somerset prosecutor had wanted an arrest; and Middlesex citizens protested that it was no accident that wealthy folks from Somerset should want to pin the crime on a New Brunswick lad.

There weren't much witness, and if so they would be paid, false testimonies. Several others stated that a private detective hired by Mrs. Hall had attempted to bribe them to stay quiet. However, Jane Gibson, quickly labeled the "pig woman/" who had a decent but changing testimony, held accusations that eventually brought the widow and her two brothers finally to trial in 1926.



The new Somerset prosecutor, stung into action, arrested Mrs. Hall in the middle of the night, as well as her two brothers and cousin. She alone would be released on bail until trial. In the four intervening years, however, masses of evidence had vanished, including autopsy reports and grand jury testimony.

Long after Frances Hall (picture to left) and her brothers were acquitted of the killings which took place later that evening a few miles away, she and Willie lived on in the three story mansion, then on a full city block, which was billed as one of the grandest residences in town and which had been their childhood home. Soon after Mrs. Hall died in 1942, the house was purchased by the women's college, and it has been the home of the dean of the college ever since. This was the house that Mary Hartman lived in.

Years later, it was discovered that Louise Geist, one of the former maids in the Hall family, had told Mrs. Hall on September 14, 1922, the day of the murder, that she knew Hall intended to elope with Mrs. Mills. He also alleged that along with Mrs. Hall and Willie, his wife had been driven out to the lovers' lane that evening and intercepted the minister and the choir singer, that she had received five thousand dollars for "her part in the matter and for keeping quiet about it."

In a study of the case in 1962, the lawyer William Kunstler argued that the jury at least reached the correct verdict. In his view, the Ku Klux Klan was responsible, and was strongly committed to strict standards of sexual morality and known to punish severely anyone violating marital fidelity.

Willie asked Julius Bolyog (confessed this 48 years later) to take envelopes from Frances and give them to two young men standing in an alleyway, which he did. He didn't kill the couple, but he definitely knew Willie was involved.

There is no telling whether the truth of the identity of the murderer or murderers will ever be uncovered, but the documents themselves have many other truths to tell about forgotten lives in our past. Here, surely, is America's most fascinating unsolved homicide.