

THE DEAN MURDER

ON THE MORNING of August 14, 1918, Jaffrey was rocked to the core by news of the disappearance of Dr. William Kendrick Dean and the subsequent finding of his body in a rainwater cistern near the "big house" on the Dean farm, brutally strangled and murdered with a blunt instrument. The body was wrapped in a horse blanket and weighted down with a 27-pound rock. In the village the people had seen Dean only the night before, with his horse and buggy, doing his weekly shopping of groceries. Before returning home he had stopped at the home of his friend, the village banker, and upon arriving at home he had unloaded his provisions and gone to the barn about midnight, as was his custom, to milk his Jersey cows. Added to the bizarreness of the case was the fact that his milk pail was never found, and the discovery of an initialed cigarette case in the bottom of the six-foot cistern after the recovery of his body, which immediately disappeared.

When, in due course of time, he did not return, his frail and invalid wife became alarmed and in the morning relayed news of his disappearance to authorities. The day was a beautiful sunny August one, as the search was initiated by Chief of Police Perley H. Enos, and the three Jaffrey Selectmen, Edward C. Boynton, William F. Coolidge, and Peter E. Hogan. Later developments divided the town, turning friend against friend, neighbor against neighbor, as the developments unfolded themselves, and the repercussions are still being felt over half a century later.

Since the case was fraught with possible espionage and deep mystery, it was carried to Washington, D. C., by the local authorities, where it is still classified, at latest reports, as one of the nation's ten most interesting unsolved cases. In Jaffrey it was seemingly otherwise, as the town became divided. There was a segment of the population who, in their own minds, had "solved the case," basing their conclusions upon the fact the horse blanket in question admittedly belonged to the town banker, Charles L. Rich, and the fact he had appeared at the bank that morning with a blackened eye and lacerated cheek. In his testimony, however, he explained that he had pressed the blanket on the victim the night before to ward off the chill of the mid-August night on his trip home, and that his facial disfigurement was due to a kick from his horse.

Dean was a gentleman farmer on one of Jaffrey's sightliest hilltop farms, having abandoned his chosen medical profession on account of the threat of pulmonary disease, which brought him to Jaffrey where in 1889 he bought the former Elijah Smith farm. His wife was his cousin, Mary Dean; and he himself was born in Wilmington, Delaware, February 12, 1855, the son of Rev. William and Maria (Main) Dean. He was educated at Hamilton College in western New York State. In Jaffrey he was highly respected as a man of culture and refinement and a good neighbor, virtues which his wife shared with him.

For a long distance the writer's parents' farm was only a road apart from the Dean farm, and the writer, then a schoolgirl, remembers the Deans well. As neighbors they were of the best. By that time, as a matter of finances, they had moved from the "big house" to the bungalow nearby, renting their former home to a couple from New York, Mr. and Mrs. Laurence Colfelt, Jr.

Strange things were happening in Jaffrey about the time of their arrival, including reports of lights flashing on Mt. Monadnock over a period of about two years. It was known that

Dean, whose barn chores were midnight duties, had watched these lights, gathering as much information along with them as he could. Later it became known that holes had been bored in the window casing of the big house overlooking the eastern mountains, Pack Monadnock and Temple. Through them signal lights were said to have been flashed to the mountains from where they were relayed to Mt. Monadnock. It was believed by intelligence that these lights were associated with the movement of troop ships from the coast to the theatre of operation of World War I in Europe. At any rate, President Woodrow Wilson had demanded the recall of two top ranking German citizens, Capt. Franz von Papen, military attache at the embassy, and Capt. Karl Boy-Ed, naval aide, back to Germany. Both were reportedly connected with German espionage in the United States since the start of World War I. Spy reports continued to float around the countryside, alarming its citizens.

The writer recalls Colfelt as a courteous man who was frequently seen on horse back on Old Peterborough Road, and sometimes assisted her mother in turning her horse and buggy around at a point beyond the Dean farm road, after taking her children part way to school. But he appeared to be a man of few words and rather mysterious. Shortly afterward Dean had asked the Colfelts to leave and they moved to Greenfield, New Hampshire.

The Parmenter house in Peterborough had just recently been donated for a hospital and on the thirteenth of August, 1918, Mrs. Horace Morison of that town was driving along the countryside soliciting articles for a sale for the benefit of the proposed hospital. When she called at the Dean farm, Mr. Dean took her aside and asked her when she was going to Boston next. She answered she was going the next day. He confided to her that he had carefully verified information which he was ready to give to the proper authorities and would she ask the secret service in Boston to send one of their best men to Jaffrey to confer with him. The information he had he said was "too dangerous for a woman to know." While the two were talking, there was a crash of twigs or underbrush in the nearby woods, the cause of which was never explained.

When pulled from the six-foot deep cistern, Dean's neck was garroted with a horse tie rope, his head wrapped in burlap, and his body wrapped in the horse blanket. With the gruesome find and the evidence available, the people went wild with excitement, fantastic stories were told, and "sides" were chosen by the people which are still in evidence locally, more than fifty years later, with most of the principles in the case now deceased. Secret Service agents and Pinkerton detectives arrived to search and study the case and interrogate the people. Among those who came to Jaffrey then was Bert Ford of the Boston *American* who obtained information on his own which he collected into a book, which, if it were available today, would classify among the best sellers. The County and State officials, however, were reluctant to act, ostensibly for lack of sufficient evidence. An attempt was made by some to incriminate Mrs. Dean, who was a frail and nearly invalid woman. After the murder she made her home with the Rev. Francis R. Enslins and died September 15, 1919, at the age of 68 years, three months, and four days.

Dean's father, the Rev. William Dean, was one of the first American missionaries to China. In 1860 he moved to Siam with his family and there became closely associated with the king of Siam. His son, William, then a lad of five years, became a playmate of the prince of Siam. Returning to the United States, he was educated by his uncle, Dr. Henry Dean of Rochester, N.Y., and while still a medical student he was placed in charge of the Rochester Hospital. This is the boyhood and youth story in brief of the man who later met such a tragic fate in Jaffrey.

No inquest of the murder was held and there was no autopsy until five months later. Grand jury action was delayed for nine months, and finally the case was publicly dropped unsolved, although there are still periodical eruptions, and the “sides” taken over fifty years ago are still being felt.

Source: Lehtinen, History of Jaffrey, New Hampshire, Vol III, Pp176-79.