

## **Who killed Dr. Dean? Jaffrey Historical Society seeks information about century-old slaying**

By PAUL CUNO-BOOTH Sentinel Staff Feb 20, 2018

Dr. William K. Dean had the peculiar routine of milking his cow around midnight. So there would have been nothing unusual when, late one August night in 1918, he left his Jaffrey farmhouse and headed for the barn.

He never returned. The following morning, searchers found Dean's body in a cistern. The 63-year-old had been bludgeoned, bound, garroted with a rope and wrapped in a gunny sack along with a 27-pound rock.

The case was never solved, though not for lack of imagination. One theory implicated a prominent local banker; another, a rumored German spy. The Dean murder remains legendary in the region, in part due to what one researcher called its "spy-novel complications."

Now, a century later, the Jaffrey Historical Society is looking for new leads.

The organization plans to mark the centennial of the slaying this August with exhibits and events, including an original play.

As part of that effort, they're crowd-sourcing clues.

"We're reaching out to the community to see if there might be any other information ... whether it's in people's attics or some story passed down from a relative who was alive at the time," said Mark Bean, a former president of the historical society and a member of an affiliated group researching the Dean murder.

True-crime buffs already have a wealth of information, including some 1,000 pages of FBI files and hundreds of pages of grand jury testimony, translated from shorthand by Bean's mother, Margaret Bean. The historical society has some pieces of evidence from the original investigation.

But researchers say more tidbits could be out there.

"There are long memories in town about this," said Ken Sheldon, the Peterborough-based writer the historical society has commissioned to write the play.

The historical society isn't seriously trying to solve the Dean case with its latest campaign for clues, Mark Bean said. "The intent is really to shed light on the historical significance of the murder."

Dean's death came four years into what was then called the Great War. Rumors about possible German subterfuge bounced around the rumpled topography of the

Monadnock Region. Some people said they saw strange lights flashing from the peaks, perhaps signals from enemy agents.

One narrative placed Dean's demise into that context — and was buttressed by strange circumstances.

On Aug. 12, 1918, Dean spoke to someone — a Mrs. Morison — who had scheduled a trip to Boston. As then-N.H. Attorney General Oscar L. Young told a grand jury in 1919, Dean asked Morison to visit federal authorities in the city and request officials dispatch someone to Jaffrey to investigate German activities. (Dean divulged no more details to Morison, telling her, in Young's words, "it was a man's job, it wasn't a woman's job, and he wanted her to go in there and have them send out a man.")

Dean was killed the next night.

Then there were the whispers about Lawrence M. Colfelt, a wealthy New Yorker who had rented a house on Dean's farm until early June.

Townfolk thought the "mysterious and well-to-do stranger" might work for the Germans, Margaret Bean wrote in her introduction to the grand jury transcript. Among the circumstantial evidence: He had money and didn't work, but lived in New England year-round. If not for some nefarious purpose, so the thinking went, "Why else would he spend the winter in New Hampshire?"

Perhaps Dean stumbled onto Colfelt's allegiances, and was killed as a result, some hypothesized.

In his testimony, Young mentioned the rumors and imputed a motive for Colfelt's choice of residence.

"The mountains overlook the valley to the south, and to the east the Temple Mts.," Young said of the Dean farm. "It might well be selected as a place for sending signal lights."

But Colfelt appeared to have an alibi, Young said. He had been at a hotel in Portsmouth.

Charles Rich, a respected banker, judge and town moderator in Jaffrey, was also suspected.

Rich and Dean were friends, Young said.

"They were men of similar tastes," he said. "They were both somewhat scholarly, that is, they liked good literature. And they liked good things to eat. And they both enjoyed sitting down and having a cigar smoke together. And they liked to play billiards." Dean visited Rich the evening of his death.

Rich appeared to have no motive for killing Dean. But the morning after the murder, he turned up with an unmissable black eye. Rich explained that his horse had started and kicked him, Young said.

Dean's wife also came under suspicion, according to Margaret Bean. Young's account portrays her as suffering from dementia.

The murder's aftermath fractured the town along religious and socioeconomic lines. Rich was a member of the town's largely Protestant economic elite, who rallied around him after he was accused, Mark Bean said. That divided them from the factory workers, many of them Catholic and French-Canadian.

"For a generation, people didn't even talk about it, because it had so much hard feeling," Bean said. "The only way the town could move forward was for there to be sort of a tacit agreement that they weren't even gonna talk about it anymore."

That toxic atmosphere is one reason Sheldon thinks the historical society's campaign could shake new evidence loose. Bound by tribal allegiances, or fearful of the economic consequences of going against the owning class, some residents may have kept quiet publicly but confided in family, he said.

And a few big finds could be lurking out there yet. Sheldon said a detective from the Pinkerton agency investigated after the murder, collecting witness accounts that have since disappeared. Some pieces of physical evidence are also missing.

"The way things happen, they could be sitting in somebody's attic somewhere," he said. " ... That would be gold. That would be the 'Antiques Roadshow' find."

*Anyone with information on the Dean murder can contact [info@deanmurder.org](mailto:info@deanmurder.org).*

*Additional reading about the murder is available at the historical society's website at [www.jaffreyhistory.org/](http://www.jaffreyhistory.org/).*

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