The background of the image is a photograph of the Rockingham County Circuit Court building, a large, classical-style stone structure with a prominent central dome and clock tower. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark red filter. The text is presented in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a dark red outline, set against this background.

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

A survey of the 20th Century criminal records of the Rockingham County Circuit Court reveals an unseen side of the rural communities of the county. The records tell a story of crimes of passion, the desperate measures the Great Depression forced people to resort to, family disputes taken too far, and even politically motivated violence. The stories the records tell are of great interest to anyone interested in the history of the county or criminal history.

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v T.S. Yeager, 1931

Written by: Megan Pullen

Case files can be found [here](#).

The \$950 Forgery

In 1931, Mrs. Lucy E. Henton of Keezletown, an elderly widow running her farm alone, needed a \$125 loan to buy a team of horses. T. S. Yeager, a Culpeper native boarding with her daughter in Harrisonburg, offered to help. He showed Henton a telegram claiming he would receive \$900 from his soldier's bonus, and convinced Lucy to sign a blank promissory note.

A Yes sir, he heard me speak about wanting some horses. He frequently said something about getting the horses himself. I had another man looking at some horses, and he was a farmer, and I thought he would know more about the horses than Mr. Yager did. He got the horses for me, and I had to have \$125.00. Mr. Yager came into the kitchen one morning, and showed my daughter a telegram that he had got from Pennsylvania, and he said he would have nine hundred dollars deposited in his bank in Pennsylvania by the 6th of April. And I asked him then if he would loan me \$125.00, and he said he would. He offered in the first place to loan me \$125.00; told my daughter to show me the telegram that he had received. He came down then one morning in a big flurry. Had his hat and overcoat on, said I should sign the note, and he would

Instead, Yeager filled the note out for \$950.

He then tried to use it as payment at several automobile dealerships, but each time, he was turned away. Authorities eventually caught up with him in Altoona, Pennsylvania. He was brought back to Rockingham County, convicted of forgery and uttering, and sentenced to nine months in jail.

Yeager picked the wrong woman to swindle. Read an excerpt Mrs. Henton's testimony pictured on the left.

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Patrick Hanafan

Written by: Ryan Kroeger

Case files can be found [here](#).

Not all true crime stories end with someone behind bars. Take for instance a murder trial that made waves in the Rockingham County community. In 1857, defendant Patrick Hanafan was tried in front of a jury of his peers for the felonious, willful, and malicious stabbing of one Patrick Gorman. Hanafan, on January 22nd of 1856, was said to have mortally wounded Gorman with a stab wound that was three inches wide and six inches deep. The complaint for the homicide was filed by Michael Ward who stated that Patrick and Thomas Hanafan attacked Gorman with the intent to maim, disfigure, disable, and kill him.

Despite the complaint and the death of Gorman, Hanafan was found not guilty by the jury and was acquitted of the charges. There isn't any information as to dealings of the case that led to the death of Gorman nor the not guilty verdict. Not much genealogical information can be found on the Hanafan family after the verdict was rendered. This just goes to show that the burden of proof can be too much to overcome even for some of the most high-end and high-profile cases.

Other Sources: "Alexandria Gazette Newspaper Archives, Oct 2, 1857, p. 1."

Acquitted.

The jury in the case of Patrick Hanaphan, charged with the murder of Patrick Gorman, returned a verdict of not guilty. The case was given to the jury on Friday afternoon, but they failed to agree until Saturday afternoon, when they returned the verdict above stated.—*Rockingham Register.*

The image shows a handwritten document on aged, yellowed paper. The text is written in cursive and includes several names and signatures. At the top, there are names like 'J. H. Warton', 'Reamer', 'Tom W. Mechem', 'David', 'Mich. Ward', 'H. J. Warton', 'James Canal', 'J. W. Warton', 'T. S. Jones', and 'M. H. Egan'. In the center, there is a prominent phrase: 'We The Jury find a Verdict of Not Guilty'. Below this, there are more names, including 'F. N. Saliaferro, Foreman'. On the right side, there are vertical signatures and names, including 'Patrick Hanafan' and 'Commonwealth'. The document appears to be a formal record of a legal proceeding.

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Jehu Long

Written by: Jordan Mongold

Case files can be found [here](#).



Let's explore a criminal court case of Jehu Long—a man who held multiple roles in the Harrisonburg community. He served as a mail carrier, carpenter, Overseer of the Poor, and even Chief of Police from 1887 to 1893. A true jack-of-all-trades, Long was also a landowner, with property records showing he once owned land on High Street.

Despite his public service, Long found himself entangled in legal trouble more than once. On June 17, 1910, he was charged obstruction of justice—accused of willfully interfering with a Harrisonburg policeman while carrying out his duties.

His case quickly made its way through the legal system, and Long was convicted of the offense. His conviction resulted in another \$5 fine and court costs totaling \$18. O.B. Roller, the mayor of the Town of Harrisonburg allowed for the case to be appealed. While records of the appeal's outcome are not housed at the courthouse, this case offers a complex portrait of Long.

In photo: Joseph Kavanaugh (left), Chief Jehu Long (seated), and William Fultz (right)

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v James Tooel

Written by: Christopher Jacobs Case files can be found [here](#).

On July 1st, 1841, James Tooel was charged with "(being) armed and feloniously carry(ing) out of the county of Rockingham in the Commonwealth of Virginia, into the County of Shenandoah within the said Commonwealth the following slaves to wit, Jacob, Polly, Conrad, Jacob Junior, Mariah Margaret, Sarah, Mary, Peggy, Hugh, Ann, Joseph, and Simion the slaves and property of Henry Kisling (...), Charles the slave and property of John Hedrick and, John the slave and property of Jacob Brill, (...) without the consent of the said owners of the said slaves, or either of them, with the intention to defraud and deprive (them)."

The exact motive behind Tooel's actions remains a mystery. Was he seeking financial gain by transporting enslaved individuals, who were treated as property during the 19th century? Alternatively, could Tooel have been an abolitionist attempting to help these individuals escape bondage and increase their chances of freedom?

Whatever his intent, the court found Tooel guilty. He was sentenced to three years in the state penitentiary and fined \$100. Despite extensive research, there is little trace of Tooel—or anyone involved in the case—after the trial. Stories like these often leave the Archives Team with unanswered questions.

The Commonwealth of Virginia to the Sheriff of Rockingham County (writing): We command you, that you cause to come before the judges of our Circuit Superior Court of Law and Chancery at the Court house on the first day of October next, Twelve good and lawful freeholders of your County, residing as near as may be to the place where the felony was committed of which James Tooel stands accused, every one of whom is proposed proffers of a Visable estate real and personal of the Value of \$500. at the least to Recognize or show Oaths whether the said James Tooel is guilty of the felony aforesaid or not, and have them then the names of the said freeholders and the first Witness Henry Gambill Clerk of our said Court at the Court house the 2^d day of September 1841. and in the 11th Year of the Commonwealth

H. J. Gambill

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Kenneth Rhodes

Written by: Megan Pullen

Case files can be found [here](#).

What started as a Halloween prank on the night of October 31, 1961, ended with gunfire and arrests in West Rockingham. Four local youths—Owen Simmons, Carson Cupp, and Thomas Sager—were charged with damaging property. But it was Kenneth Rhodes, 23, of Dayton who escalated the situation when he fired two shotgun blasts at a moving car.

Rhodes claimed he was protecting the farm of Ralph Landes after previous damage had been done. Believing the youths knocked down fodder shocks, Rhodes told Commonwealth Attorney Sipe that he fired one shot over the boys' heads and another at the car as they drove away.

Rhodes was ultimately charged with shooting at a motor vehicle and later pled guilty to unlawful shooting. Though sentenced to 6 months in jail and fined \$100, his jail time was suspended with good behavior for 3 years.



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Jesse Lincoln

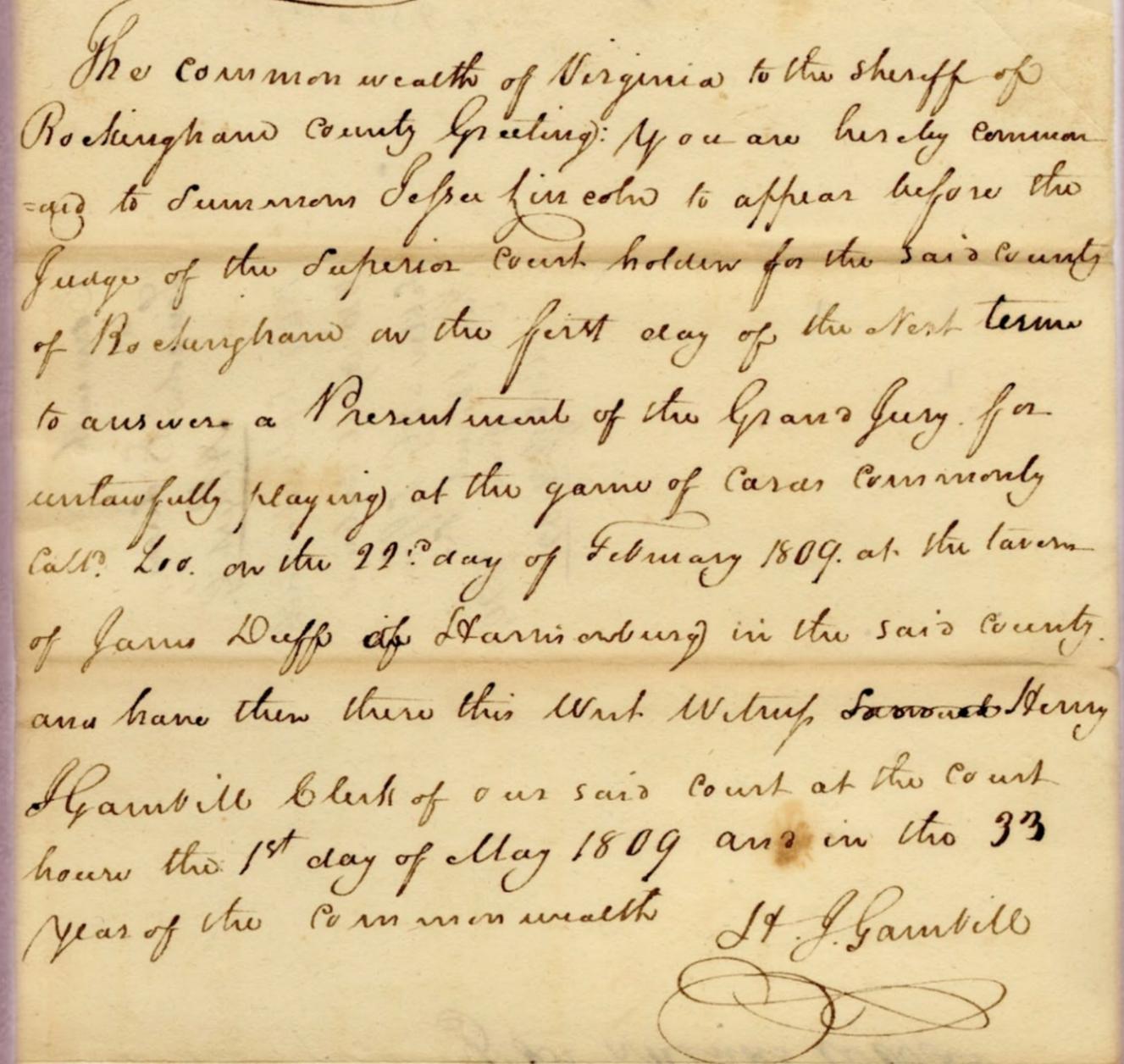
Written by: Jordan Mongold

Case files can be found [here](#).

On February 22, 1809, Jesse Lincoln was at a local Harrisonburg tavern. Perhaps he went after a long day of work to unwind and meet with some friends. While his age cannot be verified, the 1810 census shows that he was under the age of sixteen when the following event occurred. When visiting the tavern, he made the unfortunate decision to play a card game called "Loo". Loo, or Lanterloo, was a popular historic card game that originated in England. The game requires five or more players and uses the traditional 52-pack of cards. It can often get intense and rowdy and attract the attention of law enforcement.

Lincoln's night out at the tavern ended with him facing a charge over unlawful gaming. There are numerous records from this time period of Rockingham County citizens breaking this law and having to appear in court. There are even repeat offenders that just couldn't stay away from the cards; one example of this being James Duff who appeared in at least three court cases over unlawful gaming in 1810.

This case illustrates the significant changes in Virginia's society over time, as shifting priorities and evolving laws have shaped the development of new cultural norms. Could your favorite card game have landed you in court in the 1800s?



The Commonwealth of Virginia to the Sheriff of Rockingham County Greeting: You are hereby commanded to summon Jesse Lincoln to appear before the Judge of the Superior Court holden for the said County of Rockingham on the first day of the next term to answer a Presentment of the Grand Jury for unlawfully playing at the game of Cards commonly call'd Loo on the 22^d day of February 1809 at the tavern of James Duff of Harrisonburg in the said County and have then there this Writ return'd to the Hon^{ble} J. Gambill Clerk of our said Court at the Court house the 1st day of May 1809 and in the 33^d Year of the Commonwealth J. Gambill



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Ada Louise Graham

Written by: Megan Pullen

Mrs. Graham's "House of Ill-Fame" (Part 1)

In 1906, Ada Louise Graham, a widow, found herself at the center of a dramatic courtroom battle, accused of operating a disreputable house on Effinger Street, fronting Federal Alley. Allegedly, her residence was frequented by "idle and destitute persons, both men and women, for the purpose of prostitution and lewdness." Initially convicted by Harrisonburg's Mayor Roller, Graham appealed to the Circuit Court, asserting that she was merely a hardworking mother supporting her two sons and elderly mother, Amanda Tumo, who she claimed was the true lessee of the house.

The trial revealed the moral tensions of the era, with Prosecutor George Conrad presenting a compelling case. Testimonies from Chief of Police Armentrout and local neighbors painted a condemning picture of the household, with accounts of late-night visitors, questionable characters, and liquor deliveries. Surrey drivers even testified to transporting suspicious guests to the residence.

Despite this, Graham's defense fought back. Supportive neighbors and her mother testified that the family earned a modest living through sewing and washing, and Graham denied any involvement in running a disreputable house. However, after intense cross-examination and closing arguments, the jury found her guilty, sentencing her to ten months in county jail, along with court fees and costs.

TEN MONTHS IN JAIL AND A FINE OF \$125

Jury's Verdict in Case of Ada Louise Graham.

MAYOR ROLLER SUSTAINED.

Prisoner Led from Court-Room to Jail Weeping Bitterly—Her Counsel May Take an Appeal.

JAIL SENTENCE AND FINE.

Jury's Verdict Sustains Mayor in Case of Ada Graham—Counsel May Appeal.

Mrs. Ada Louise Graham, a notorious character of the town, was placed on trial in Circuit Court Friday charged with conducting a disreputable resort on Effinger street. The case came up on appeal from police court, where the defendant had been convicted last October before Mayor O. B. Roller, who sentenced her to serve a term of twelve months in jail and pay a fine of \$100.

The woman made a bold defense on appeal, which was conducted by E. B. Crawford and Jas. B. Stephenson, both well known criminal lawyers, and claimed that instead of being an offender against the laws of morality and of the State she was a much maligned widow, who earned a livelihood and contributed to the support of her two sons and her mother by sewing, taking in washing, and working out. In addition to that, if the place was disreputable she was not responsible inasmuch as her mother, Amanda Tumo, and not herself, was the lessee of the house.

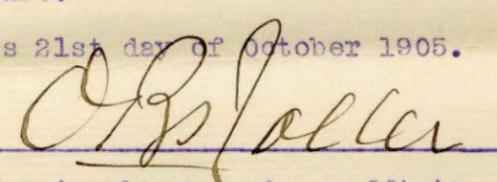
Case files can be found [here](#).

Harrisonburg,

Rockingham County, Virginia, To Wit:

Be it remembered that on the ~~21~~ 21st day of October 1905, Ada Graham was brought before me, O. B. Roller, Mayor of Harrisonburg and ex officio Justice of the Peace for Rockingham County, Virginia, charged with a misdemeanor, in this, that she, on the _____ day of October 1905, as well as on divers others days and times, in said town, ^{in said county} unlawfully did keep and maintain, and does now keep and maintain, a certain house of ill-fame, resorted to during all that time, and now resorted to by divers idle and dissolute persons, both men and women, for the purposes of prostitution and lewdness, and is by me, upon the evidence on oath of G. A. ~~Nichol~~ Nichol and others, found guilty of said offence, wherefore I adjudge that she, be confined in the jail of Rockingham County for the term of twelve months, and that she pay a fine of One Hundred Dollars, and \$ 3.00 costs. But the said Ada Graham having prayed an appeal from my said judgment, and tendered Joseph Dorsey as her surety, who, together with the said Ada Graham entered into recognizance in the penalty of \$500.00, conditioned upon the appearance of the said Ada Graham before the ~~xxx~~ Circuit Court of Rockingham County, Virginia, on the 1st day of its next term, an appeal is hereby granted her to the said 1st day of the next term of said Circuit Court of said County, and the said judgment and conviction, as well as said appeal are hereby certified to the said Court.

Given under my hand and seal this 21st day of October 1905.


Mayor of the Town of Harrisonburg, and ex officio
Justice of the Peace. (Seal).

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v John H. Mouberry and John Kersey

Written by: Megan Pullen

Case files can be found [here](#).

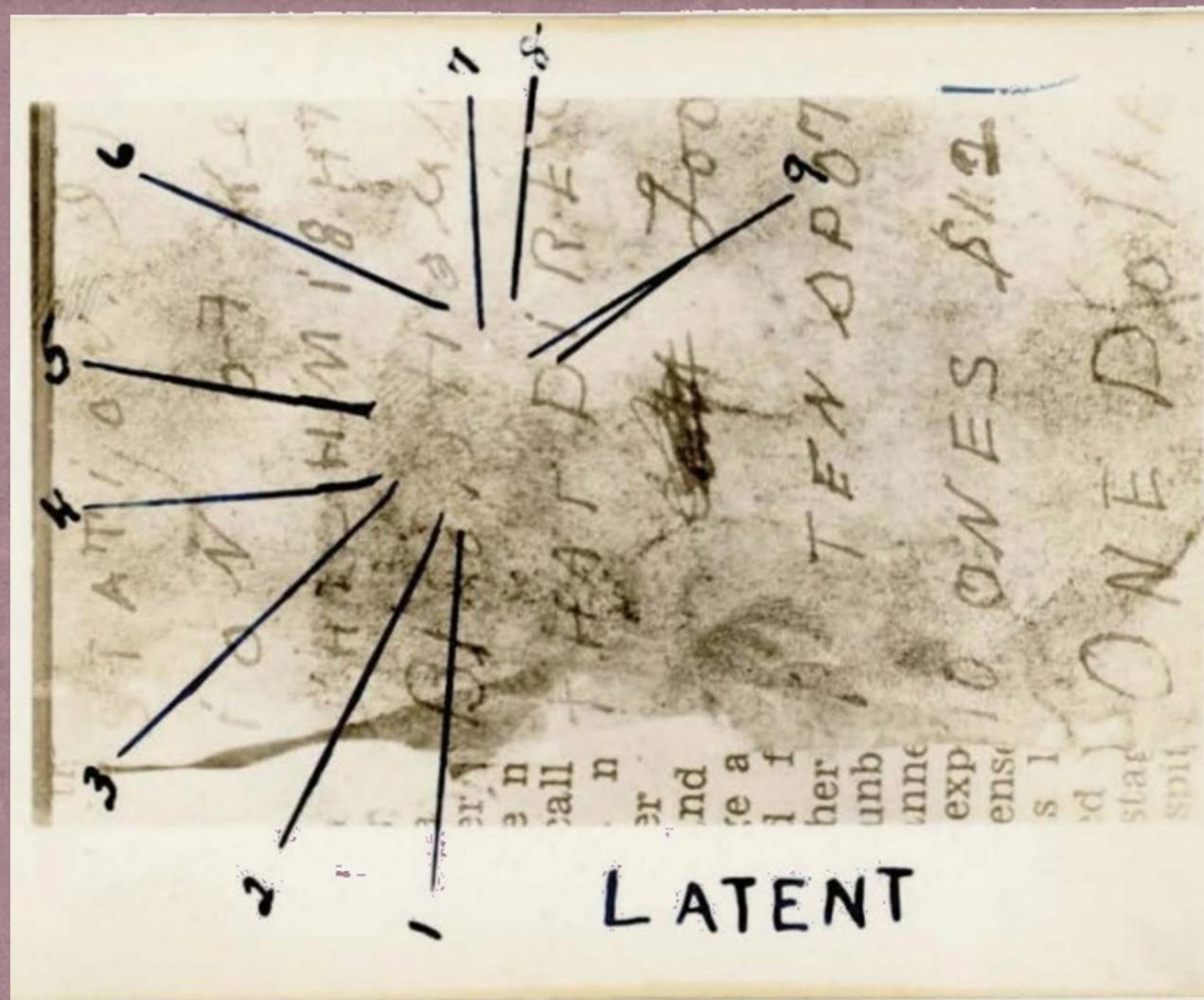
Fingerprints and Bloodhound Trails

John H. Mouberry and John Kersey were at the center of a trial in Rockingham County Circuit Court, charged with the Christmas morning robbery of a McGaheysville business, the Hawkins Filling Station, in 1933. The state's case hinged on fingerprint evidence and bloodhounds that led authorities to Kersey's home, where Mouberry also resided. A critical piece of evidence was a note left on the Rockingham County Jail's front porch during Kersey's preliminary hearing, which confessed to the crime. A Staunton fingerprint expert testified that the prints on the note matched Mouberry's.

Initially, both men were found guilty of housebreaking and sentenced to 18 months. However, Judge H.W. Bertram set aside the sentence, granting a new trial after the defense argued legal errors. In October, Mouberry was retried, found guilty, and sentenced to one year in the state penitentiary. Kersey, however, was acquitted.

Remarkably, the original case file still holds the note, fingerprint analysis, and the money bag referenced in the letter!

THE FAMILY 9 AM 8 01 1933
to try and correct a
MISTAKE. I robbed FILLING
STATION. I LEFT IN DIRECT-
ION OF KERSEY'S HOME
WHICH MIGHT HAVE CAUSED
BLOODHOUNDS TO GO IN
THAT DIRECTION.
~~THE~~ Loot
1 TEN SPOT 7 FIVE SPOT
10 ONES \$12 IN CHANGE
ONE DOLLAR WAS A
SILVER ONE SOME
CIGARETTES. HERE
IS ONE MONEY BAG
YOURS TRULY



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v John Crigler

Written by: Megan Pullen

Case files can be found [here](#).



On April 23, 1906, John Crigler was charged with breaking and entering. His target wasn't money or valuables—it was poultry. Under the cover of darkness, Crigler broke into a chicken house on P.O. Sullivan's property on North German Street (now Liberty Street). His haul? One turkey and 20 chickens, valued at \$7.50 but worth far more to Mrs. Catherine Sullivan, who depended on them for income.

The plot thickened when two deputy sheriffs testified about what they discovered the night after the break-in. They saw Crigler leaving his boarding place with a bucket of ashes. Hidden in the bucket were feathers, chicken bones, and a turkey head. The deputies followed Crigler for several hundred yards, watching as he tossed the heads of four chickens into a ravine.

Their investigation led them to Mrs. John McCreary's home, where Crigler boarded. In a closet, the officers found two live chickens. When they returned the birds to the Sullivan residence, Mrs. Sullivan immediately recognized one as hers— a crippled chicken that had been taken. McCreary admitted that Crigler had come home late on the night of the theft, carrying several chickens, which they ate over the next few days.

In the Shenandoah Valley, where family farms were a way of life, chickens and turkeys were vital for both food and income. For farmwives like Catherine Sullivan, barnyard flocks were essential, often bringing in extra money from selling eggs at local stores. In a region now known as the "Turkey Capital," poultry theft was a serious crime that could devastate a family's livelihood.

John Crigler's theft didn't just stir up dust; it ruffled feathers in a community where poultry wasn't just food—it was a lifeline. Although his crime might seem minor today, in 1906 Rockingham County, it was scandalous. The jury found Crigler guilty, sentencing him to two and a half years of hard labor at the penitentiary.

Hurst's Standard Forms, Annotated. } No. 35. Indictment. } Hurst & Company, Pulaski City, Va.

[Code, §§3989, 3999, 4000, 4011, 4045; Hurst's Guide & Manual, pp. 537 (3), 540-5, 546, 617-18.]

Commonwealth of Virginia,
COUNTY OF Rockingham, TO-WIT:
IN THE ~~COUNTY~~ ^{Circuit} COURT OF SAID COUNTY:
The jurors of the Commonwealth of Virginia, in and for the body of the County of Rockingham, and now attending the said Court at its May term, in the year 1906, upon their oaths present that John Crigler
on the 23^d day of April, in the year 1906, in the said County, feloniously did break and enter a certain ^{out-}house, commonly called a chicken house, the property of P. O. Sullivan, and not adjoining to nor occupied with the dwelling house of the said P. O. Sullivan, with intent to commit larceny therein, and one turkey and 20 chickens of the value of \$7.50 of the goods and chattels of Catherine P. Sullivan in said chicken house ^{then being} feloniously did steal, take, and carry away.



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Willie Gaines, Charles Byrd, and Marvin Williams

Written by: Megan Pullen [Case files can be found here.](#)



A group of five men was charged with breaking into the Harrisonburg Coca-Cola Company on North Main Street, but now we get a glimpse of what really happened that night through the words of Willie Gaines, one of the accused.

In his testimony, Gaines, age 30, explained how the events unfolded: On Sunday night, around 11 o'clock, a man called "Sugar" came to Gaines at the restaurant where he worked on Federal Street and asked to borrow a car. "With him was a tall thin (...) boy who I didn't know and a boy named Marvin Williams. I told Sugar I didn't know where to get a car. I thought from the way he spoke we were going on a party. Sugar then suggested I ask Homer Wood for his car, which I did. Homer let me have his car around 11:30 that night."

Gaines went on to describe how the night quickly took a turn when they picked up another person, Charlie Byrd. According to him, they headed to an alley behind the Harrisonburg Coca-Cola Company:

"Sugar told me to drive down the alley alongside the house and turn the lights out, which I did. When I stopped, there was an iron safe lying on the ground near the right-hand side of the car. The other four boys got out and attempted to load the safe into the car while I remained under the steering wheel. But then Charlie got scared and ran away. The safe fell against the car, and I pulled away with Marvin Williams jumping on the running board. I haven't seen Sugar or the other boy since."

After a dramatic trial following the December 1936 break-in at the Harrisonburg Coca-Cola Company, Gaines was found guilty of grand larceny. The jury has fixed his punishment at four years in the state penitentiary. Meanwhile, Charles Byrd was found not guilty by the jury.

MORE PICTURES ON FOLLOWING PAGE

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Willie Gaines, Charles Byrd, and Marvin Williams

Written by: Megan Pullen Case files can be found [here](#).



**ARTICLE ON
PREVIOUS PAGE**



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Thomas Bryan

Written by: Macy Waid

Case files can be found [here](#).

On the morning of August 4th, 1813, Thomas Gilmore was brutally attacked in his home. He was struck six times on the back of his head with an ax, leaving gashes three inches deep in his skull. The attacker, Thomas Bryan, had been staying at the Gilmore household.

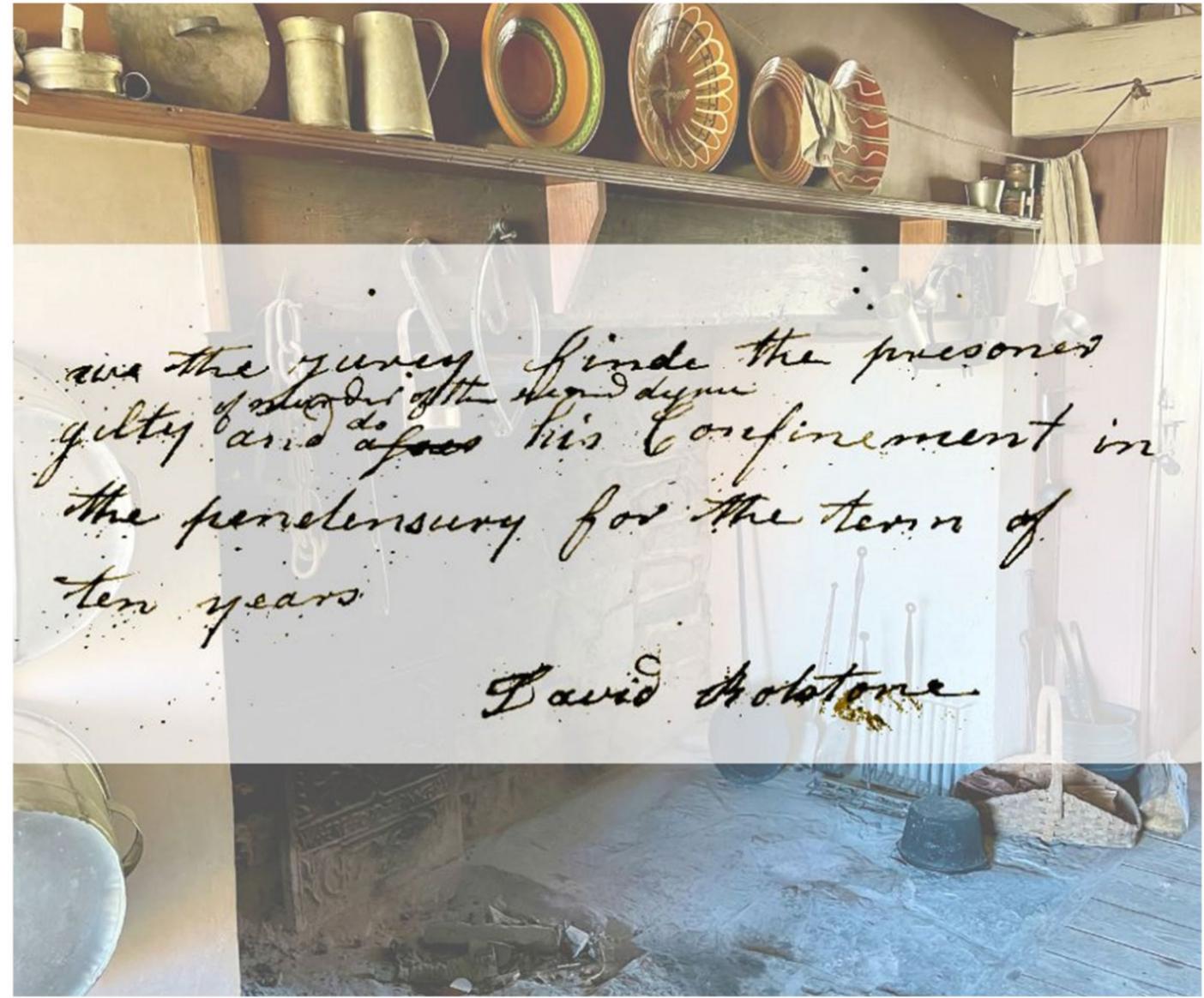
The night before the attack, a drunk Thomas Bryan had repeatedly refused Gilmore's demands to leave his house. The following morning, the confrontation continued. Polly Gordan, present during the incident, witnessed Gilmore striking Bryan with his shoe while Bryan was asleep, attempting to wake him and force him to leave.

Mary Gilmore, Gilmore's wife, was outside in the milk house when their young son, Joshua, rushed in. He told her that Bryan had attacked his father and that she needed to return to the house immediately. Upon entering, Mary saw her husband kneeling on the floor, bleeding from the back of his head. When she asked who had attacked him, Gilmore identified Bryan as his assailant.

Several people arrived at the house following the attack and witnessed the aftermath, including George Hamilton, George Coogler, Thomas Berry, and Luke Rice. Rice even asked Gilmore directly if Bryan had attacked him, to which Gilmore responded affirmatively. William Rice testified that he saw Bryan with the ax outside the house after the incident.

A critical piece of evidence against Bryan was the angle of the cuts. Hamilton stated that the ax must have been wielded by a left-handed individual to make the cuts at such an angle. During the trial, John Blain, an acquaintance of Bryan, testified that Bryan was indeed left-handed.

The jury found Thomas Bryan guilty of second-degree murder, stating that Bryan, "not having the fear of God before his eyes but being moved and instigated by the Devil," committed the crime. Bryan received a 10-year prison sentence for his actions.



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Charles Leonard Wean

Written by: Macy Waid

Case files can be found [here](#).

On a cold December night in 1947, 35-year-old office worker Charles Weaver was finishing up his day. His office was situated right across from the City Produce Exchange, today the Local Chop and Grill House. As he sat at his desk, a crashing sound cut through the silence of the night. The window in the adjacent room had broken. Charles turned his body just as a bullet cut through the window in his office. The bullet sped towards him and found its target in Charles' right shoulder. One block away sat the shooter, Charles Leonard Wean. He had positioned himself on a higher floor in order to shoot downwards towards Charles Weaver.

While it is not clear why Wean was motivated to attack Weaver, the jury found that the 45-year-old painter had specific intentions to harm Weaver. Wean was tried and sentenced to 3 years in the state penitentiary. Weaver testified alongside Chief of Police, William J. Kean who responded to the shooting. Wean passed away in 1951 shortly after completing his sentence due to a self-inflicted bullet wound. On the other hand, Weaver lived until 1994 and passed at the age of 83.



MORE PICTURES ON FOLLOWING PAGE

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Charles Leonard Wean

Written by: Macy Waid

Case files can be found [here](#).



**ARTICLE ON
PREVIOUS PAGE**

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v E.L. Klingstein

Written by: Megan Pullen

Case files can be found [here](#).



The Raid on Friddle's Restaurant and Case of "Cap" Klingstein

On June 17th, 1933, Harrisonburg was shaken by a high-profile raid targeting illegal liquor operations. Chief of Police J.H. Boice, armed with a search warrant, led a dramatic operation at Friddle's Restaurant on Court Square. Finding the building locked, Chief Boice and his men forcibly entered, uncovering bottles of illegal Yuengling beer. This raid was part of a larger, city-wide operation hitting six properties simultaneously.

This bold move was a test case for the legality of 3.2% beer under the Cullen-Harrison Act, which allowed low-alcohol beverages but required state legislation. Virginia's delay in enacting this law led to confusion and conflict.

The trial of "Cap" E.L. Klingstein, the owner of Friddle's, became a focal point. Accused of possessing thirty-four bottles of "amber fluid," Klingstein argued he had sought legal advice from local officials and attorneys prior to purchasing the beer from a Pennsylvanian salesman. "Cap" Klingstein stated, "I was advised by the attorney that in his opinion it was perfectly legal to sell it or to have it in my possession."

The jury found Mr. Klingstein guilty and handed him a \$500 fine for violation of the Virginia Prohibition Act. Unhappy with the verdict, Klingstein sent his case to the Virginia Court of Appeals with the motion to dismiss the prosecution against him. Upon review, the Court of Appeals ordered that the case be reversed and annulled. The case was remanded back to the Circuit Court, with the direction to dismiss the prosecution.

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Rosser Smith Morris

Written by: Megan Pullen

Case files can be found [here](#).

In a shocking confession from 1938, Rosser Smith Morris, aged 59, revealed the grim details of the murder of his wife, Fannie Barton Morris, near Elkton, Virginia. After working all day, Rosser came home to find one of his shoes missing, which his daughter Lorraine said Fannie had thrown away. This small incident fueled his rage, and he spent a sleepless night plotting his wife's murder.

Early the next morning, while Fannie was making breakfast, Rosser took one of his knives and stabbed her in the kitchen. She cried out, waking their children, and fell to the floor. Rosser fled the scene, planning to hide at his brother's farm, hoping his family would shelter him.



Photo: 1- Rosser's pocket knives, entered as evidence.

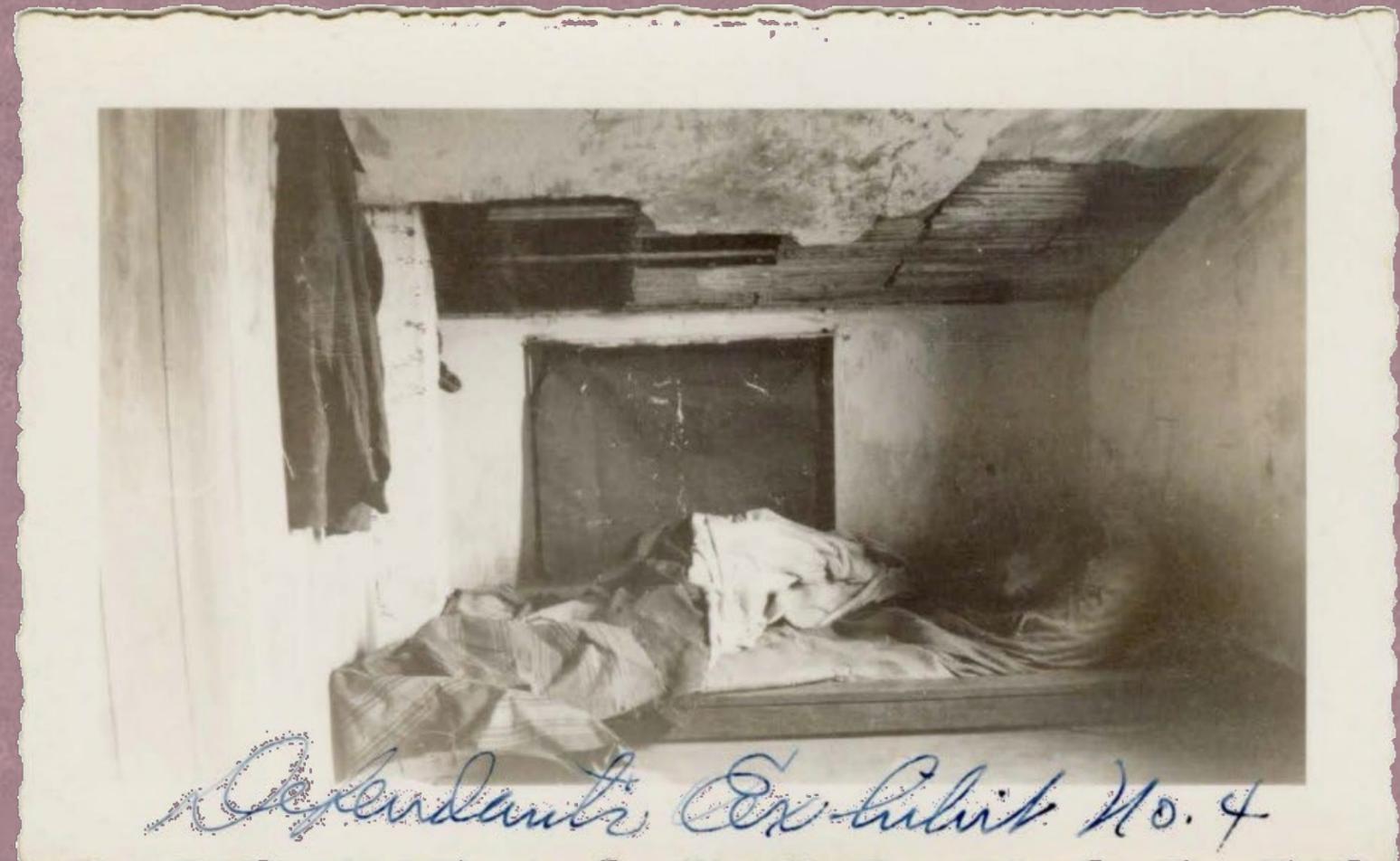


Photo 2- Rosser's bed, entered as Defendant's Exhibit 4.

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v James Miklos, Roger Lowe, Jr. & Robert Harrington, Jr.

Written by: Megan Pullen & Marina Curry

For case files, click on each name above.

Three men from Harrisonburg, Va., found themselves in the custody of the Rockingham County Jail on Sept. 23, 1963, shortly after the Rockingham National Bank Grottoes Branch was targeted in a brazen robbery. Construction workers James Miklos, Roger Lowe Jr., and Robert Harrington Jr., all in their early twenties, were apprehended within 30 minutes of stealing more than \$6,000 in cash.

According to court records, the men entered the bank unmasked and were met by three bank employees: Frances Eaton, Jean Trobaugh, and Selma Grove. Eaton, the bank manager, recalled that two men walked behind the counter where she was standing and demanded that she empty the cash drawer. Miklos, who was later identified to be in possession of the gun, set the firearm on a counter, which was pointed at Trobaugh as she stood and watched as they emptied the drawer. After receiving the money, the three female bank employees were locked behind an iron gate in the bank vault; however, the vault door remained open.

A customer, June Kaylor, arrived three minutes after the men fled the scene in their car. As soon as Kaylor freed the employees, Trobaugh alerted the bank's president and the police, reporting that about \$6,210 was taken from one of the bank drawers. They noted that no customers were present during the robbery and that no one was injured or physically mistreated.

The perpetrators fled the scene by car, which was caught speeding by a deputy sheriff while directing traffic on Pineville Road, between Montevideo and Port Republic. A chase ensued with law enforcement, with the suspects abandoning their vehicle in a wooded area near the C.T. Hinkle farm. Officers pursued the men on foot, and the trio came out of the trees and complied with the officers' orders. They were swiftly apprehended and taken into custody. Upon search, the stolen cash was discovered in their possession.

The three men were brought before Judge Porter R. Graves in Rockingham County Court for arraignment later that afternoon. Bond for each suspect was set at \$15,000, and they were remanded to the county jail.

Harrington admitted that the three men met at Susie's Lunch in Harrisonburg and continued to drink beer at several establishments throughout the evening. Harrington stated that Miklos mentioned the possibility of a bank robbery and the three men spent the rest of the night and morning meticulously planning their crime. They had expected to enter the bank when it first opened for business but were delayed.

Miklos and Harrington pled guilty, while Lowe entered a not guilty plea. Miklos received a 20-year sentence in the state penitentiary. Harrington Jr. was sentenced to five years, and Lowe received an eight-year sentence. The swift resolution of the Grottoes bank robbery demonstrates the importance of cooperation between local law enforcement and the community. The employees' quick thinking and the officers' successful apprehension of the suspects show the value of vigilance and swift action.

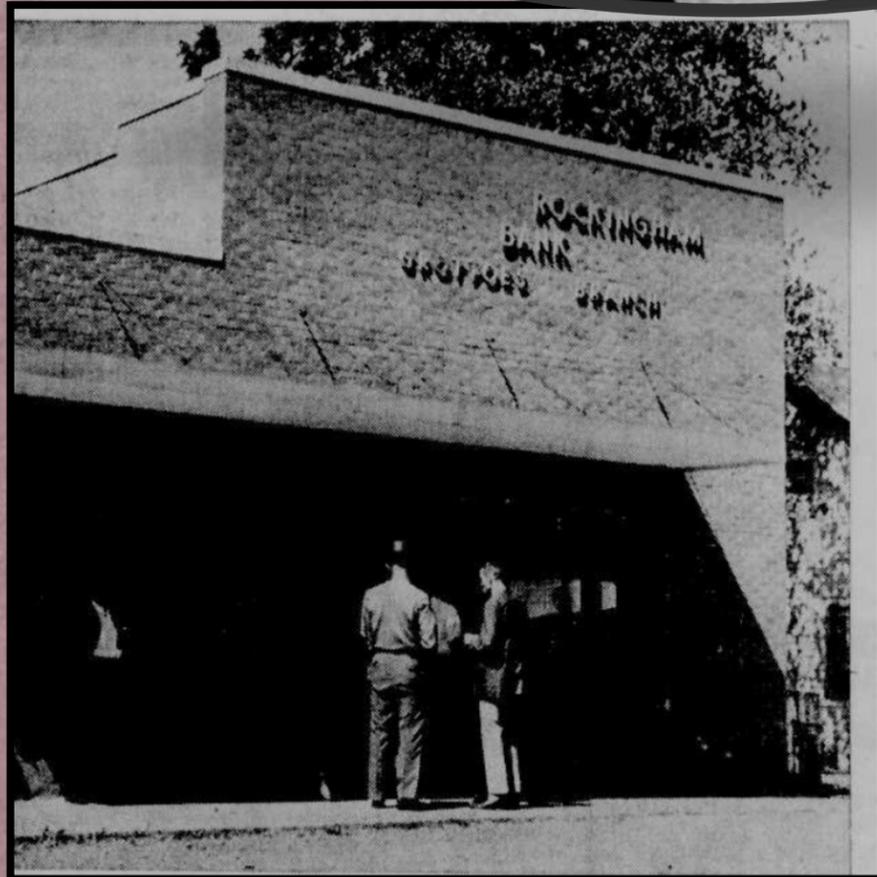
PICTURES ON FOLLOWING PAGE

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v James Miklos, Roger Lowe, Jr. & Robert Harrington, Jr.

Written by: Megan Pullen & Marina Curry

For case files, click on each name above.



EMPTY DRAWER — Miss Frances Eaton, manager of the Grottoes Branch of the Rockingham National Bank, examines the empty drawer

from which three robbers grabbed over \$6,000 Monday. Money in a second drawer and the bank vault were overlooked by the hold-up men.

**ARTICLE ON
PREVIOUS PAGE**

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Marvin D. Showalter

Written by: Marina Curry

Case files can be found [here](#).

The Kavanaugh Hotel, a staple of Harrisonburg before its demolition, had four fires occur between May 1950 and October 1952. These fires were purposeful, all started by Marvin Showalter, a local resident of Rockingham County. Showalter, an employee of the Kavanaugh Hotel, was arrested in October of 1952 for lighting a fire that he purposely snitched on himself for. That night Showalter called the desk clerk, Mr. Wampler, and asked him if he smelled smoke. Wampler stated that he did not smell smoke, leading to Showalter calling Mr. William Geary, manager of the hotel, asking him if smelled any smoke in the building. Geary opened a door and discovered smoke rising up the elevator shaft, which then destroyed the hotel's telephone and electric services, creating \$8,000 in damage. After a large investigation by the Harrisonburg Police Department, Fire Chief, and State Fire Marshal, Showalter admitted his guilt. For a brief period, Showalter was sent to Marion, Virginia to reside at the Southern State Hospital for observation, where he was eventually declared sane, and charged with a felony for his crimes in Rockingham County.

Hotel Clerk Is Given 20 Years

Marvin Showalter Is
Sentenced For Setting
Kavanaugh Blaze



Kavanaugh Hotel, SULL0191.jpg, Robert James Sullivan Jr. Papers, ca.1930-2013, SC 0003, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA
<https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/sull/159>

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Jackie Hensley

Written by: Marina Curry

Case files can be found [here](#).

On a Sunday in May of 1955, 21-year-old Evelyn Dale Lam, affectionately known as "Dale" by friends, concluded a telephone conversation with her ex-boyfriend, Jackie Hensley. During this exchange, the former couple arranged for Lam to return personal belongings to Hensley, who had sent them while stationed overseas in the U.S. military. The following day, Hensley arrived at Lam's residence as planned. However, the situation took a drastic turn when Lam stepped outside to deliver the items to her ex-boyfriend. As she approached him, Hensley became physically aggressive, forcibly pulling her into his vehicle and abducting her.

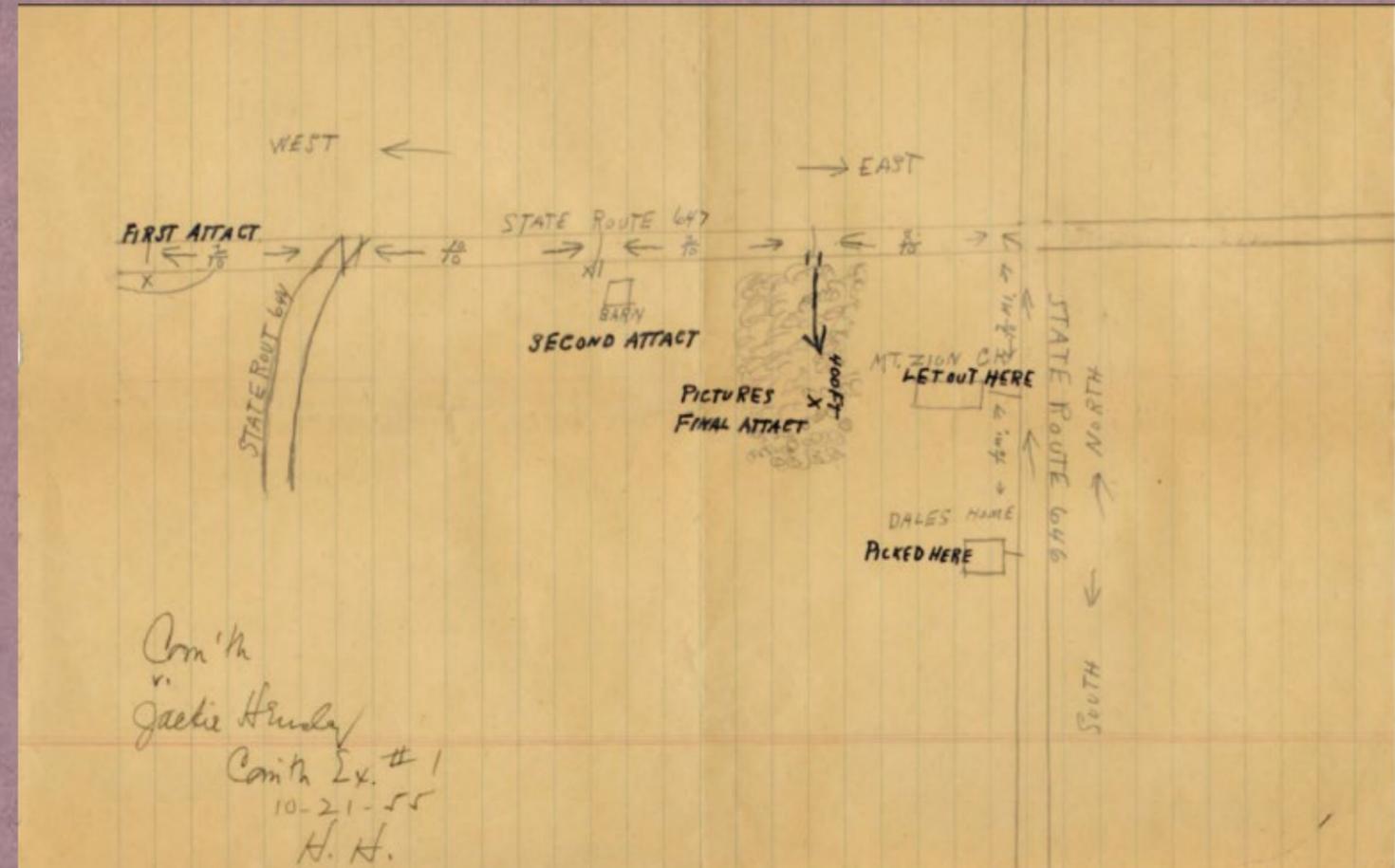
But why and where did Hensley take Lam? Court records indicate that both individuals lived in McGaheysville, and the abduction was near the Massanutten Resort. Hensley detained Lam for about two hours, relocating her to four different sites in that timeframe.

Initially, according to Hensley's testimony and trial exhibits number, Hensley transported his ex-girlfriend from her house near Route 646 to the "location where the John Hopkins cabin burned," where he bound her with rope and leather. Then Hensley drove to Lam's aunt's old barn, where Hensley subjected Lam to physical assault, resulting in a ruptured eardrum. Subsequently, he moved her to a third location nearby, known as Coleman's Lane. Here, Lam made an unsuccessful attempt to flee, as Hensley forcibly restrained her. Finally, she were taken to Piney Lane, a wooded area.

In a secluded spot 400 feet into the woods, Hensley forcibly disrobed Lam and proceeded to take explicit photographs of her, intending to use them for extortion. He presented Lam with two options: either reconcile with him by severing ties with her current boyfriend, or pay \$2,000 to prevent the dissemination of the compromising images.

Lam, unable to comply immediately, feared that even acquiescing to Hensley's demands would not guarantee her safety from future exploitation. Hensley kept the photographs and returned Lam to her residence, where she promptly confided in her sister about the ordeal. Together, Lam and her sister sought medical attention in Elkton to address Lam's injuries and reported the incident to law enforcement.

On May 15, 1955, authorities charged and apprehended Hensley on charges of felonious kidnapping and extortion. His trial commenced on May 31 and concluded in October of that year, spanning five months. Multiple witnesses provided testimony, including Lam, who submitted a letter dated May 11 expressing her reluctance to return Hensley's gifts, Deputy Sheriffs Dewey Haney and Melvin Hoover, Jesse Lam, Dr. W.H. Nicholson, Reese Hensley (Hensley's father), among others. Ultimately, Hensley pleaded guilty to assault and battery, receiving a six-month sentence and a \$50 fine from the Rockingham County Circuit Court. Consequently, the Commonwealth dropped the kidnapping charge. The subsequent interactions between Jackie Hensley and Evelyn Dale Lam remain undisclosed. Nevertheless, Lam proceeded with her life, marrying Edwin Kite of Elkton on November 24, 1955, subsequent to the trial's conclusion.



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Kemper Maston

Written by: Macy Waid

Case files can be found [here](#).

In the tranquil outskirts of Rockingham, the Maston family settled into a modest life. Kemper and Elizabeth Maston, a young couple seeking to provide for their small family, moved to Rockingham from Pennsylvania. However, their dreams shattered when their youngest child, 8-month-old Diane, fell victim to an unfathomable tragedy.

Diane's life was marked by an illness causing violent seizures. Despite the couple's desperate efforts to seek treatment, the seizures persisted, casting a shadow over their household.

On a January evening in 1958, Kemper returned home weary from a day's work to a scene of distress. Kemper arrived home from work to see Diane suffering from a "fit". He proceeded to slap and shake her in an attempt to revive her from a "coma". In a state of desperation, Kemper turned to the only source of guidance at his disposal—the Air Force Manual. Struggling to maintain composure, he followed its instructions, wrapping Diane in a blanket and placing her beside them as they retired for the night.

They awoke at 1:00 am to find her lifeless body. Kemper ran to the neighbor's house to call for help. The next day, police detained the couple and interrogated them separately. Both wrote out a complete timeline of the events of that night.

Additionally, Kemper signed a statement that cleared his wife of all blame and accepted it himself. His solemn admission of involuntary manslaughter sealed his fate—a sentence of two years behind bars. Records show that Kemper passed away in 1958, though it is unknown if this was in prison. The whereabouts of Elizabeth after the incident are not recorded. Records faded into obscurity, leaving behind unanswered questions. This case is a poignant reminder of a tragedy that tore a family apart, leaving behind only the case records and faded memories of a young family.



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v James Taylor, Jr.

Written by: Macy Waid

Case files can be found [here](#).

On October 4th, 1959, James Taylor Jr. ran into Calvin Hill outside of Unca Lou's Restaurant on East Wolfe St and Community Street. The two knew each other as acquaintances but soon were engaged in an argument. According to Taylor, the pair exchanged a verbal discourse, but Hill suddenly turned and reached into his pocket. Taylor stated he feared it was a gun and pulled out his own in an act of self-defense. He then shot Hill 3 times. Seven people witnessed the altercation on the street. Taylor then fled the scene and called the police. He confessed to shooting Hill and directed the police to where he had thrown the gun. He pleaded not guilty and claimed self-defense. The 12-man jury sentenced Taylor to 20 years in prison for the incident.

This case serves as an example towards the attitudes of the period. The prosecutor for this case, Commonwealth Attorney Charles Earmen, was also the prosecutor against Solomon D. Arbogast. The trials even occurred in the same year (Arbogast was sentenced April 30, 1959, and Taylor Jr. was sentenced November 20, 1959). The Arbogast case had similar circumstances. Both cases involved the perpetrator claiming self-defense after an altercation with the victim. Additionally, both suspects suspected the victim was armed. The main difference was the race of the suspect. Solomon D. Arbogast was a white male and James Taylor Jr. was a black male. There is no information on the race of the jury in Taylor's case, but this could have also had an effect. Both individuals were charged with second-degree murder, James Taylor Jr. was sentenced to 20 years, and Arbogast received five years. This difference of sentences may speak to the role race played within the court system of the period.



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Solomon Arbogast

Written by: Macy Waid

Case files can be found [here](#).

In the quiet city of Harrisonburg, a murder shook the community. Pete Reese, a lumberman and WWII veteran who served Asian Pacific Theater campaign from 1942-1946 in the 272nd Quartermaster Refrigeration Company, fell victim to Solomon Arbogast, also a veteran. Their dispute over a liquor payment turned fatal.

In an attempt to prove he had substantial finances, Arbogast presented a check for \$58.65 (this value would be equivalent to \$629.78 in 2024). According to Arbogast, Reese proceeded to beat him in order to take the check. Arbogast then stated that he ran to a nearby house to get a ride home. Upon arriving at his house, he realized the check was missing and left with a .44 caliber pistol to confront Reese. Arbogast drove six miles before reaching Reese at a service station. He then stated that he found that check in the driver's seat of the vehicle, but Reese started to approach him. Arbogast allegedly fired a warning shot into the ground to make Reese back down but fired a second shot into Reese's stomach. Investigators later found a bullet from Arbogast's gun in the wall of the station showing that the first shot was fired there and not into the ground. On December 16, 1958, Pete Reese passed away in the Rockingham Memorial Hospital. In court, Argobast and his defense team claimed self-defense; the opposition argued that Argobast made a 12-mile round trip to seek out Reese. Arbogast did display bruising when arrested and claimed it was the result of the beating sustained by Reese. The jury found Arbogast guilty of second-degree murder and he was sentenced to 5 years in prison.



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Delaney Allen Black

Written by: Macy Waid

Case files can be found [here](#).

A walk between two longtime friends ended in disaster on September 14th, 1962. Louise Virginia Black and Delaney Allen Black (no relation) took a walk on that fateful night. Witnesses saw the pair approaching the house of Harry Black, Delaney's cousin, located off of Stone Spring road south of the city. A few hours later, gunshots and screams were heard followed by Delaney walking alone away from the house. He turned himself in but claimed he had no knowledge of Louise Black's whereabouts that night.

Harry and his wife spent the evening in Harrisonburg, away from their house. Upon returning home, the couple heard dogs barking and Harry went to check it out. He discovered the body of Louise with six gunshot wounds to her chest. Delaney maintained his claim of innocence from interrogation to sentencing. He went on to file a habeas corpus, a petition that calls for evidence of why a prisoner is incarcerated but withdrew it later. Delaney felt the court did not have enough evidence to hold him before sentencing, but his council advised against filing the petition due to the significant evidence the court held against Black.

Delaney Black's motive remains a mystery. Some sources cite that he loved her, but there remains no evidence of a relationship beyond friendship. Delaney Black was married at the time to Mary Edith Wean, but legal records show they had been separated for five years, since 1958 (Delaney later filed for divorce in 1976). Regardless, the jury found Black guilty and sentenced him to 30 years. As the years pass, one question remains; Did Delany Black commit this crime out of passion? If not, what was the cause that led the events to transpire on that tragic night?



HARRY BLACK HOME — Where the body of Miss. Louise Virginia Black, (no relation), was found Friday night, was viewed by many Sunday motorists. The house is located off the

Stone Spring road south of the city. The body was found outside the rear of the house.

(News-Record Photo)



TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v John Showalter

Written by: Thomas Kidd

Case files can be found [here](#).

In March of 1908, John D. Showalter was accused of seducing a minor, Miranda C. Wetzell. At the time, the charge of seduction was defined as "any man who shall seduce and debauch any unmarried woman shall be guilty of a felony." The law was passed to protect females from being seduced by flattery or false promises of marriage by men.

The conviction of Showalter, who was sentenced to three years in the state penitentiary, hinged on the postcards entered as evidence. Showalter delivered encrypted messages to Wetzell which contained instructions on meeting times and places for their illicit affair. He was later pardoned by the governor in 1934. Seduction charges were repealed by the General Assembly in 1994. Our team has been trying to decode the postcards. If you think you can, please let us know!



SEE MORE ON
FOLLOWING PAGE

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v John Showalter

Written by: Thomas Kidd

Case files can be found [here](#).



**ARTICLE ON
PREVIOUS PAGE**

TRUE CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Case: Commonwealth v Herman Hoover

Written by: Thomas Kidd

Case files can be found [here](#).

On December 31st, 1952, Herman Dean Hoover shot and killed Ernest Laco Carr with a 12-gauge shotgun. In addition to killing Carr, Hoover also wounded Amie and Gilbert Fulk and Earl Hess. Miss Fulk was injured when a single buckshot entered the Abe Carr house through the east window, striking her in the lip. Mr. Fulk and Earl Hess were fired on by Hoover when they attempted to load the wounded Carr into his vehicle. The shooting arose from an argument between Hoover and his fiancée Vivian Fulk. After engaging in an argument with Carr after being ordered to leave the premises, Hoover smashed in a window, and left briefly before returning with a shotgun and a belt full of shells, shooting Carr in the back. Hoover was AWOL from the Army at the time of the shooting, his criminal history including a charge of dynamiting fish in April of 1947.

Despite Hoover's criminal record, public opinion of the victim was rather negative, with Carr's bad reputation arising from involvement in two "serious cutting scrapes." This reputation was felt even among his family, having been shot once before by his brother. According to one citizen interviewed by probation officer William Ralston: "Herman Hoover knew that Laco Carr was hard to kill and he made sure that he did a good job." The victim's reputation notwithstanding, Hoover waived indictment and pled guilty, and was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment on Tuesday, July 14, 1953.

7-1a

REPORT
of the


LABORATORY

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
WASHINGTON D. C.

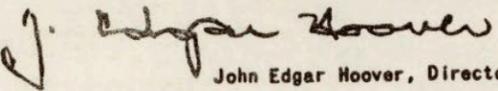
January 30, 1953

To: Mr. George D. Conrad
Commonwealth's Attorney
Rockingham County
Harrisonburg, Virginia

There follows the report of the FBI Laboratory on the examination of evidence received from your office on January 19, 1953.

This examination has been made with the understanding that the evidence is connected with an official investigation of a criminal matter and that the Laboratory report will be used for official purposes only, related to the investigation or a subsequent criminal prosecution. Authorization cannot be granted for the use of the Laboratory report in connection with a civil proceeding.

Re: HERMAN D. HOOVER, Suspect
LACO CARR, Victim
MURDER; 12-31-52
Rockingham County, Virginia


John Edgar Hoover, Director

YOUR FILE NO.
FBI FILE NO. 95-47792
LAB. NO. PC-34778 BX

Examination requested by: Addressee

Reference: Personal visit 1-19-53

Examination requested: Firearms

Specimens:

Q1-Q5 Five 12 gauge shotgun shells found at crime scene
Q6-Q12 Seven lead pellets
Q13 Six 12 gauge shotgun shells in shell belt

K1 12 gauge Remington shotgun #147565

RESULTS OF EXAMINATION:

Test shotgun shells were fired in the submitted 12 gauge Remington shotgun, K1, and compared with the five shells listed above as Q1 through Q5. As a result of this comparison Q1 through Q5 were identified as having been fired in K1. Due to the mutilation of the seven lead pellets listed above as Q6 through Q12 it was not possible to determine their exact size. The three smaller pellets were most similar

1 - Mr. Alfred L. Strawderman
Sheriff of Rockingham County
Harrisonburg, Virginia