

MURDER MYSTERY IN SADDLE RIVER TOWNSHIP (PART 3)

This last installment of our murder mystery is as surprisingly unbelievable as the accounts presented in Parts One and Two. What actually happened?

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MURDERER EBERHARD IS FOUND, CONFESSES

Got Away to Canada, but Came
Back with an Elaborate Lie
to Hide His Crime.

SHOT HIMSELF FOR PROOF

After Telling of Being "Kidnapped"
He Broke Down and Told the Truth—
Murdered for Love of an Actress.

Driven by the strange instinct which so often forces a murderer to return to the scene of his crime, Augustus Eberhard, the grocer's assistant, who lured his aunt and his fiancée, her daughter Ottilie, to a lonely spot near Rochelle Park, N. J., last Sunday, shot them both, and fled after robbing Mrs. Eberhard's body and leaving it on the railroad track to be mutilated by a train, came back yesterday morning to Paterson and gave himself up to the police. He had got away and had traveled a thousand miles to Chicago. Then he returned with an elaborate lie, and finally confessed the lie and his crime.

Apparently he still had hopes of clearing himself of all suspicion when he returned. He hid the spoils of his murder, manufactured a marvellous tale of being imprisoned in a cellar by Italians, and deliberately shot himself in the leg to give color to his yarn. But when he was questioned by Public Prosecutor Koester his nerve broke down. He declared that he had shot his aunt and tried to murder his cousin for the sake of an actress.

All the incidents of arrest for murder he took with absolute coolness. He led the police back to the woods beyond Paterson, and showed them where he had hidden his aunt's money and his own, and even picked out the fallen tree beneath which he had deposited his clothes. He denied absolutely that he had any accomplices in the murder, and asserted that what he did was on the impulse of the moment. Then, apparently completely oblivious of the position in which he finds himself, he ate a hearty dinner and complained bitterly because his coffee was not sufficiently sweetened.

Meanwhile, across the street in Hackensack, from the police station where Eberhard was a prisoner, his cousin, Ottilie Eberhard was staying. They did not meet and at first Miss Eberhard refused to believe that Augustus was really guilty. Only when Prosecutor Koester gave her the details of the finding of the money and the circumstantial account of what Augustus had done, would she acknowledge that he could have been guilty.

Found on a House Stoop.

Robert D. La Rue of Little Falls, a village a couple of miles from Paterson, was the man to find Eberhard. He saw him sitting on the stoop of his house about 6 o'clock yesterday morning. He was in rags, and was nursing his left leg. It was torn with a revolver shot, and seemed to be badly in need of attention.

La Rue questioned the man, but he would give no account of himself. He said he needed assistance and asked that a doctor be sent for. La Rue telephoned to the Paterson police. Acting Captain Perry replied that, as Little Falls was outside of the city limits, the man must be brought to the boundary. La Rue hitched up a horse and drove Eberhard in until he was met and taken in custody by Policeman Cook.

"What's your name?" asked Cook.

"I'm Gus Eberhard," the man answered, and then refused to answer further questions. He was taken to the General Hospital to have his wound dressed, and was hurried from there to Police Headquarters. There he told a remarkable tale. After describing how he had induced his aunt and cousin last Saturday afternoon to take a trip into the country toward Rochelle Park, he went on:

Said He'd Been Kidnapped.

"Coming home, I lost the way. We were walking along some railway tracks when a heavy storm with frequent flashes of lightning broke. All of a sudden I heard a report like a flash coming from behind a freight car in the direction of my aunt. I saw her fall to the ground and then came four more shots. Ottilie, my cousin, screamed, and I yelled to her to run for her life.

"I ran, too, but before I had got very far I felt a heavy blow on the back of my head. When I came to I found myself a prisoner in a filthy cellar. I was in a house inhabited by Italians, and they kept me there for several days, abusing me and feeding me only on stew, sour meat, bread, and water. Last night I managed to escape through the open door, but they fired at me, and hit me in my left leg. Since then I've been wandering about in Breakneck Mountains. I had no money, as they had taken from me the \$28 I had in my pockets, and I don't clearly remember where I have been wandering."

Prosecutor Koester told Eberhard point blank that he did not believe his story, but the prisoner for a while stuck to it. He was taken before Recorder Carroll, charged with being a fugitive from justice, and was handed over to the Hackensack authorities.

Breaks Down and Confesses.

He was brought over to Hackensack in an automobile, and was once more questioned by Mr. Koester and Chief of Police Dunn. Mr. Koester declined yesterday to say in what way he managed to break down the prisoner's story, but at length he prevailed. Suddenly Eberhard burst out:

"Oh, I'll tell you all. I'll feel better after I confess. I killed my aunt with one shot. I'm a good shot, and I sent a bullet right through her heart. Then I shot at my cousin, but the papers were wrong about that. They say I fired four times, but I only fired three shots. The one that clipped her ear went through her hat as well, and that's how they made the mistake, I guess. She was too far away from me, and it was dark."

Then by slow degrees the Prosecutor obtained the full story of the murder and Eberhard's escape. He declared positively that what he did was in no way premeditated. He had, he said, a friend, an actress in New York, and she needed money. As he walked along the dark railway track, with the coal piles on either hand, and the only light coming from the occasional flashes of lightning, the picture of the girl rose in his mind, and he remembered that his aunt had \$2,000 in a bag around her neck. His only hope of getting funds lay in obtaining that money, and the revolver in his pocket suggested the means. Then, he as-

serts, in a moment of madness, he slew his aunt and fired shot after shot at his cousin.

When he was asked later why he had not been content to marry his cousin and get possession of the money in that way he replied:

"One might as well commit suicide as matrimony."

The name of the actress he told with great reluctance, as he declared she had nothing to do with the business. She was on the vaudeville stage, he said, and has been appearing at Coney Island recently. The girl he named denied last night that she even knew him.

Rode in Train That Hit the Body.

The crime committed, Eberhard said, he made an absolutely successful escape. He did not put his aunt's body on the railroad tracks, where she was afterward found badly mangled by passing trains, he said, but had contented himself with finding and taking her money bag. Then he walked into Paterson and took the 11:09 o'clock train for Jersey City.

As it drew near Hackensack it stopped. Eberhard noticed it because it meant a delay in reaching its destination and his safety, but he did not take the trouble to look out of the window for the cause. If he had he would have seen his aunt once more. The body had been found on the track and the train crew were lifting it out of the way. They did not report the occurrence, however, until they reached Jersey City, and by the time the station authorities were informed Eberhard was across the North River.

Dressed Himself as a Chauffeur.

From the ferry he hurried to a saloon in Twenty-eighth Street, near Tenth Avenue, where he had left his grip. Then he went on to the Grand Central Station and took a train for Albany. To disarm suspicion he arrayed himself in a pair of blue spectacles and a chauffeur's cap. There was a curious consistency in his plan of flight, if the murder was as unpremeditated as he professes it to have been. He traveled constantly and for long distances, but he sometimes returned on his tracks, and never took a ticket for a long journey.

From Albany he went to Troy, from Troy back to Albany. Then he took the train for Binghamton, and went on to Rochester and Buffalo. He crossed the border to Toronto, but doubled immediately back to Buffalo. Next he took the boat to Detroit, and found the night's journey intolerably long. From Detroit he made for Chicago, buying tickets, however, at Lansing and Adrian, as the train stopped.

Heard of Crime Everywhere.

What shook his nerve during this trip was that he could not escape the news of his crime. He sat beside passengers and read in their newspapers from New York, Detroit, Toronto, Cincinnati, and Chicago the latest theories of the murder. He saw his own photograph in a dozen different sheets, and had to trust that his blue spectacles would save him from discovery by those who insisted on discussing the crime with him. Whenever he alighted from train or steamer his hand was ever on his revolver, and at Detroit he gave himself up as lost when he saw a policeman scanning the disembarking passengers.

In Chicago he put up at a small hotel kept by one Pappa at Halstead and Forty-first and Forty-second Streets, near the stockyards. He had once worked in the stockyards, but he thought that under the name "Jim Allen" he was safe. He left his grip there. The Hackensack authorities will send for it. If there is anything at all the story told by Ottilie Eberhard of being dogged on the Deutschland during the passage by a man called Bergmann, whom Augustus Eberhard evidently knew, it is hoped that a clue may be obtained in Chicago. But the police are not at present inclined to believe that Eberhard had any accomplices in the murder.

He stayed in Chicago one night, and then came back to Newark, arriving there Wednesday morning. He walked over to Totowa, a suburb of Paterson, and came to the conclusion, after meditating suicide as he passed the Paterson cemetery, that he must give himself up. He hid the money in his possession and his revolver, bought a new suit, concealed his old clothes, and then tore and donned the new ones. He concocted his yarn about the Italians and deliberately shot himself in the left leg above the knee after tying a handkerchief about the leg to avoid powder stains.

Leads Police to His Caches.

When Eberhard had finished his tale Prosecutor Koester and Chief of Police Dunn took him in an automobile to the woods to find his belongings. First he showed them, lying in a brook, an electric search light he had carried on the night of the crime. Then he pointed out a place where he had concealed his aunt's money for a time. He had thought it unsafe, so removed it. He took the officials to another place a mile away, where he had finally left it.

They found without difficulty a bundle wrapped in a Chicago newspaper with a handkerchief underneath. It was a cigar box and inside was \$2,259 in American

money and six 20-gulden bills. The American money was in notes of small denominations, and it took Mr. Koester a long time to check over two hundred \$1 bills and many \$2 bills. The hiding place was about 200 feet from the Little Falls railway station.

Not far away, in a culvert, Eberhard had concealed his pocketbook. In it was \$26, which he claimed as his own money, some papers of no importance, a few photographs, and his gold watch and chain. His clothes were next recovered from a fallen tree, under which he had thrown them. The revolver, with which the prisoner shot himself could not be found. He declared he had pitched it into the woods after he had fired it and did not remember where it fell. The revolver with which he shot his aunt he said he had thrown into the Saddle River immediately after the murder.

Eats Heartily After Confessing.

Eberhard was taken back to Hackensack. There he ate with great relish the dinner which was served him. He preserved absolute composure and remarked:

"I don't suppose my father and mother will ever believe I did this. Well, I hope I'm in for a good rest in jail. I know I've deserved it."

After he had dictated a full confession of the murder to Mr. Koester's stenographer he was removed to the Bergen County Jail and locked up on a charge of murder. Prosecutor Koester said yesterday that it is possible that a special Grand Jury may be impaneled to deal with the case, as it will be Sept. 8 before the first Grand Jury of the regular order is called together.

Eberhard is a sturdily built fellow, a little below the middle height. He has curly brown hair and brown eyes. His face is clean shaven and he looks alert and intelligent. There is nothing whatever about him to suggest that he would murder a defenseless woman in cold blood and then give himself up to justice after achieving an unhampered escape and inventing a circumstantial story of his actions.

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

- The actress named by Augustus stated that she did not know him. Did he lie about her?
- Where did the second gun come from? Augustus claims that the gun that he used to kill his aunt was thrown into the river. The gun that he shot himself with was “pitched into the woods” and could not be found.
- His “real” confession did not include how the daughter was shot (grazed).
- At first, the daughter half-heartedly refused to believe that Augustus had killed her mother until she found out the details of his confession from Prosecutor Koerster. She then acknowledged “that he could have been guilty.”
- In Part One, two local farmers saw two men and a woman on the tracks prior to hearing the gunshots. Were the two men Augustus and Ernest Held? Was it a conspiracy involving the two men and the daughter?
- Why did Augustus ask his aunt and her daughter to come from Germany so that he and the daughter could be married? His statement that he “might as well commit suicide as matrimony” would indicate that he had no intention of getting married.
- This author’s guess is that the murder was a conspiracy between the daughter, Augustus and Ernest. Augustus was to receive the money; and the daughter and Ernest who were lovers, could “ride off into the sunset together.” Perhaps Augustus decided to concoct his original (false) story and go to the police because his picture and the events of the murder appeared in newspapers throughout the country.
- Augustus was sentenced to thirty years of imprisonment but was released in the 1920’s.
- Any additional information will be presented on this website.
- Please excuse the quality of the printed articles. The original articles were very small, almost unreadable.
- What was your interpretation of the murder?

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Jack Wasdyke: Township Historian