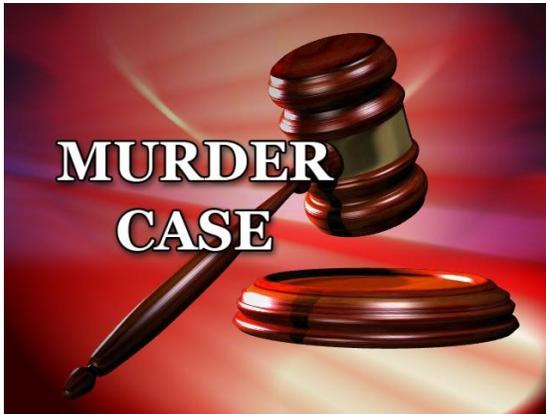


Cornwall Township Historical Society

Newsletter March 2014

www.cornwalltwphistorical.ca

Editor: Don McIntosh



In 1935, Township Rocked by Suspicious Volvey Death

It had all the hallmarks of a Hollywood movie: an alleged murder plot, an illicit love affair and a high drama court case. Did it occur in some far off exotic place? On the contrary, it took place right here in the former Cornwall Township hamlet of Bonville.

Louis Volvey, a 55 year old farmer and handyman, met his unfortunate demise on the evening of April 22, 1935 at his home about a mile east of Bonville. It was alleged that his wife, 27 years younger than Volvey, and a 28 year old transient farm worker from Amherst Nova Scotia named Clarence Cameron, conspired to kill the innocent victim because he stood in the way of their mutual romantic interests.

At about 10:00 pm on the night Volvey died Alex Duncan McPhail, a neighbour who lived across the road, received a knock on his door from Mrs. Volvey. She told him her husband had fallen down stairs and that she believed he was dead. Mr. McPhail then notified a priest, a doctor and the police and went to the Volvey home where he found Mr. Volvey's body in his home lying at the foot of the stairs. A post mortem done by Dr. Tallon concluded that death was by a broken neck as a result of a fall down the steep narrow stairway. He determined that the death occurred some time between 8:00 and 10:00 pm. However, at an inquest into the death, questions were raised about Dr. Tallon's conclusions by Crown Attorney J.G.

Harkness. The judge ordered the victim's body exhumed and another post mortem performed. The Attorney General's office appointed Toronto coroner Dr. Frankish and a completely different cause of death was determined. Dr. Frankish revealed at a coroner's inquest that Volvey's death was not caused by a fractured neck but by strangulation due to pressure applied to the man's throat. In light of the new post mortem results, Harkness' words to the coroner's jury were, "somebody killed Louis Volvey and it is up to you to consider the salient facts and find who had object to get him out of the way." With this new evidence, charges of murder were laid against Clarence Cameron and Mrs. Viney Belle Volvey.

In the weeks prior to his death, Mr. Volvey spent several weeks in hospital recovering from abdominal surgery due to stomach ulcers. It was alleged that during his absence Mrs. Volvey and Cameron carried on their romantic affair. Cameron's employer at the time and Volvey family neighbour, Ranald Duncan McPhail, was called as a witness to testify at the trial. He revealed that on occasion Cameron did not return home to the farm where he would normally sleep. On the morning of April 9, the accused had asked neighbour Alex Duncan McPhail (Cameron worked for both McPhails) to read a note for him. It read, "Meet me at Fourth St. Friday at 10 o'clock." It was signed V.V. in Mrs. Volvey's handwriting.

Further evidence of an illicit affair was brought forth by the victim's brother John Volvey. He testified that after visiting his brother in the hospital, he saw Mrs. Volvey and Cameron walking north on Pitt Street locked arm in arm. That evening the pair were picked up at Toll Gate Road by truck driver Gordon Coleman and given a ride to Bonville. From there, Coleman testified that they walked east of Bonville, in the direction of the Volvey farm.



Mrs. Viney Belle Volvey

Michael O'Neill, a fellow farm hand who worked with Cameron on the McPhail farm was called to testify with his evidence. O'Neill recalled a conversation with Cameron in which Cameron showed him a red silk scarf, a broach and some photos which he claimed were given to him by Mrs. Volvey for his birthday. He also recalled Cameron saying that he would like to marry Mrs. Volvey one day, but first he would have to "get the old man out of the way". On the night of Volvey's death, O'Neill and Cameron were splitting firewood at Alex Duncan McPhail's farm and O'Neill's recollection was that Cameron left at about 8:00 pm to return to Ranald Duncan's, about a 10 minute walk. He didn't arrive there until after 10:00. Further incriminating evidence came from farmhand and blacksmith George Kennedy in which he said Cameron told him one day, "If Mike O'Neill spills too much it will be too bad for Mike... Mike's confession might put me to the rope." Cameron was also said to have told Kennedy that once before he was charged for murder but he beat the charge and an innocent man was hanged. "I'm going to beat this charge too", Kennedy testified Cameron told him.

Startling evidence of a romantic affair between the two was given by farmer and former Cornwall Township Reeve Haratio Dow. Dow lived near Headline Road (Wilfred Amell's current residence) and employed Cameron as a farm hand for about two weeks. He testified that one day a parcel was received in his mailbox from Mrs. Volvey for Cameron. It contained a shirt, a tie and a letter which he described as "a loving one." Cameron asked Dow to read it for him because he had no glasses. In the letter Mrs. Volvey asked Cameron, "why don't you come back? If only you would do what you said you would do." The letter was signed Viney.

On March 6, 1936 after the Crown and Defence summed up their cases in the five day trial, Justice Nicol Jeffery of the Supreme Court of Ontario instructed the all male jury. The tense county courthouse was filled to capacity and constables had to be placed outside to prevent spectators from blocking the aisles outside the courtroom. Jeffery's review of the facts in the case to the jury lasted an hour and a half. He said that there was no incriminating evidence that Cameron was at the Volvey house between 8:00 and 10:00 that evening but Cameron could not account for his whereabouts. He restated the Defence's position that Cameron may have gone to the Volvey house where he was discovered together with Mrs. Volvey by Louis Volvey. A struggle may have ensued where a weakened Volvey may have fallen down the stairs. In that case Justice Jeffery said that the defendants should be found guilty of manslaughter.

After deliberating for three and one half hours the jury returned with a verdict. The pair was convicted of manslaughter. In sentencing Cameron to twenty years in the Kingston Penitentiary Justice Jeffery told him, "You have made war upon society." For Mrs. Volvey the defence had asked for clemency. Justice Jeffery said that the evidence found her to be a good mother to her three children. He sentenced her to two years determinate and two years indeterminate in reformatory. He concluded by telling her that when she serves her time, "for the sake of your children try to live down your awful past and do your duty to your children."



Throughout the five day trial Justice Jeffery complained about the poor ventilation in the packed courtroom. He attributed a cold that he suffered with throughout the trial on the impure air in the County courthouse. Concerned with all the coughing among the jurymen, he instructed Deputy Sherriff Harry

Snetsinger to procure any necessary medicine and see that they were all well cared for.

The small frame house where Louis Volvey died became well known by locals for the tragedy its occupants experienced. Shortly after the trial the Lariviere family occupied the former Volvey house. One morning early in November 1938, while her husband Joseph worked in a nearby bush, Mrs. Lariviere sent four of her six children off to school. The two remaining children were sent outside to play while she went upstairs and saturated a mattress with kerosene and set it ablaze. After the room became engulfed, Mrs. Lariviere collected the two children and started her walk to Cornwall. A passing motorist gave her a ride most of the way where upon arriving in the town she went directly to Children’s Aid Society and asked them to take over the care of her six children. They were placed in the care of Nazareth Orphanage. Sadly, this was not the first misfortune to strike the Lariviere family while they lived in the ill-fated Bonville house. One year prior in October 1937, the oldest family member 16 year old Alex died after being struck by a train west of Lancaster. He had been working on a farm in Lancaster and it is thought he was trying to follow the railway tracks to Cornwall in an attempt to make it to his parent’s home in Bonville. So perhaps this fire brought an appropriate end to the sinister happenings that cursed this unfortunate house.



At the December pot luck event, some of CTHS’s talented thespians put on a short skit to entertain members from both Lost Villages and Cornwall Township Historical Societies. The actors passed on quotes of wisdom that they gained from their life experiences. Some of the advice from the old farmers...

“Keep skunks and bankers at a distance”
 “Most of the stuff people worry about ain’t never gonna happen”

And some advice from the farmers’ wives....

“Never wear a hearing aid because if you do people expect you to listen to them”
 “It is better to ask some of the questions than to know all the answers”

Sympathies

CTHS would like to extend our sympathies to the family of Ranald McDonell. Ranald passed away suddenly on January 6. Ranald loved history and he had a particular interest studying the War of 1812. As a former president of CTHS and an active member, Ranald will be certainly missed at our meetings. Keep him in your thoughts and prayers.

On January 22 we lost another long time member, Mrs. Janet Quail. Mrs. Quail was 94 years old and her many friends and family will miss her wit and wisdom. She was a resident of St. Andrews West most of her life and a pillar in the community. We will certainly miss seeing her about. Keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

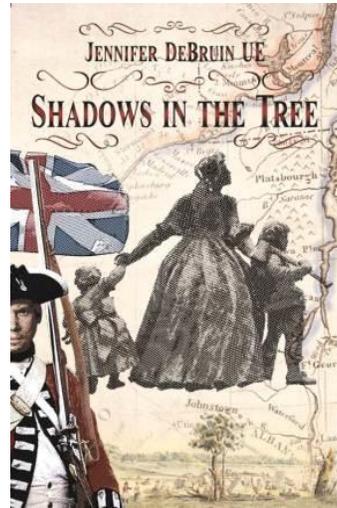


Our Historical Society purchased a copy of the recently published Cornwall Scrapbook published by the S.D.&G. Historical Society. The book is a pictorial history of

Cornwall. We have added the book to our collection of local historical books and it is now available for any member to borrow. The book is kept in our meeting room at the Heritage Centre.

Mark Your Calendars

Our next meeting will take place on Tuesday March 25 at 7:30 pm at the Heritage Centre. Guest speaker is Jennifer DeBruin UE, author of A Walk with Mary and her latest book, Shadows in the Tree. Shadows in the Tree is a novel that traces the plight of a family engulfed in the American Revolution. As United Empire Loyalists the family is compelled to abandon their home and flee to the king's lands in Quebec.



Jennifer, herself a certified UEL descendant, will take us through the background research of her latest novel. Jennifer will have autographed copies of her books available for sale for \$20.00 each.

You probably know that the International Plowing Match (IPM) is coming to the Finch area in September 2015. An antiques and history/heritage committee for the SD&G IPM was recently formed with a goal to promote the history and heritage of the United Counties. This region is full and rich in history and has played a significant role in the growth of Ontario, and indeed of Canada, in times of war and peace. The SD&G IPM 2015 provides us with a terrific opportunity to create a venue in which to showcase our history and heritage and to educate and to display historical artefacts.

If you are interested in helping with this committee you are asked to contact:

Pierre Roy
Tel: 613-525-4210 email:
glenoaks@xplornet.ca

Welcome new member

Adele Brewer from Imlay City Michigan. Adele has roots in this area her family connected to the Frasers and MacDonells.