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Scene Of Double Murder



HOME OF William Gahagan and his sister, Bonnie, scene of last Friday's double murder.

Police Probing Laurel Slayings

County and state law enforcement officials were continuing their investigation this week into the slayings of two Laurel River residents, members of one of the county's oldest families.

The two, William Grady Gahagan, 83, and his sister, Bonnie Mae Gahagan, 79, were slain late Friday evening; their bodies were found by a son, Grady Gahagan of Asheville, early Saturday afternoon.

Madison County Sheriff E.Y. Ponder told The News Record at press time that "we are still in the process of eliminating suspects."

Two shots were fired at each of the victims, one in the chest and one in the back of the head. Sheriff Ponder said there was a possibility that a fifth shot was fired. All were from 32 or 38-caliber pistols.

Scene of the murders, for which robbery was the apparent motive, was the home of Bonnie Mae Gahagan, where her brother had made his home since the death of his wife, the former Bessie Thomas, in 1979. Sheriff Ponder said the \$5,000 to \$10,000 is believed to have been taken from the house. Time of the murders, he said, has been fixed at 10 p.m. to midnight Friday.

Entry to the large white house, an historic landmark in the area (see other story in this issue), was gained by forcing a rear door to the kitchen area, where the bodies were found. Sheriff Ponder said a number of fingerprints were found at the scene. A trunk, which presumably contained the money taken in the murder-robbery, is being examined by state investigators.



Gahagan (in 1950s)



Bonnie Gahagan (1937)

Victims Called 'Gentle, Loving'

By ELIZABETH SQUIRE

A gentle, loving person whose violent death last week seemed entirely out of keeping with her life — that is how friends and relatives described Bonnie Gahagan, 78. Her brother William Grady Gahagan, 83, was in such poor health he could hardly walk without his sister's help.

The two, whose family came to Madison County before it was a county, were found shot to death Saturday in the home their father, Wade Gahagan, built in the early 1900's on the banks of the Laurel River. Wood for the house was felled on Wade's thousands of acres and cut in his own saw mills. He decorated the house with oak, curly maple, cherry and other woods. The house re-

mains a landmark, described in Underwood's history of Madison County.

The Gahagans' grandparents came from Ireland and were already extensive landowners in Madison County by 1827. Their home, built in 1840, still stands not far from the house where the murders took place.

William Grady Gahagan had been a forester. At one time he ran the Three Laurels Nursery with his brother, the late Leslie Gahagan. He is remembered as a good family man and a man who loved the outdoors, recalls his granddaughter, Sharon Franklin. He had been in and out of hospitals and was living his sister Bonnie because he was no longer well enough to live alone.

Bonnie Gahagan was still well enough to grow a large garden, full of vegetables right now. She would feed anybody who stopped by, Sharon Franklin remembers, and give to anybody in need.

A longtime friend, Pauline Zimmerman, remembers how lovingly Bonnie Gahagan looked after one member of the family after another — first her mother, in and out of the hospital for years, then her brother Leslie, until he died. And then she took care of her brother William after his wife's death in 1979. A lifelong friend, Gertrude Thomas, remembers Bonnie Gahagan as "almost a saint."

She was interested in education from the time she went to the Cook Farm School up above Belva, recalls her

cousin, Elizabeth Baker. Bonnie Gahagan's father had shown her the importance of helping to pay one of the Laurel teachers, and getting her to deliver the salary. She attended Weaver College in Weaverville. In later life she collected family history.

Bonnie and William Gahagan were members of the Hurricane Presbyterian Church, a small church near the family home, one of four for which Pauline Zimmerman's father-in-law was pastor beginning in about 1917. When he retired and the tiny church closed, Mrs. Zimmerman recalls, Bonnie Gahagan and her brother went to the church by themselves to pray and read the Bible on Sundays.

Non-I-26 Route 'Better For County'

A four-lane limited access road rather than an Interstate highway extension into Tennessee would better serve the Madison County area, in the view of Zeno Ponder of the State Transportation Commission.

And, Ponder told The News Record this week, such a non-Interstate road would be far more likely if the mandate of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is renewed by Congress. A bill to that effect has been introduced by Rep. James McClure Clarke and co-sponsored by 49 other legislators.

An Aug. 26 meeting has been called by the Unicoi County, Tenn. Chamber of Commerce to put forth a plan to extend Interstate 26, which now ends on the outskirts of Asheville, into Tennessee by way of North Buncombe and Madison coun-

ties, mainly by upgrading Route 23.

But Ponder warned that such an extension would serve through-traffic by means of cloverleaf exits required for Interstate highways, leaving it to the state to build access roads to serve possible industries in the area. The Appalachian regional approach, he said, calls for development of roads especially designed to serve the needs of the region rather than the Interstate traveler. ARC's plan would also call for funds for sewers, water supply and health care — all important to development of the region.

Most important, Ponder said, the regional roads would provide access as needed for roads leading to industrial sites — something the Interstate proposal cannot address. —E.D.S.



GOV. HUNT, Speaker Ramsey at opening ceremonies

New Medical Center Dedicated In Hot Springs

The Hot Springs Health Program dedicated the new Hot Springs medical center with ceremonies Friday morning. North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt delivered the dedication address to an audience of several hundred county residents on hand to tour the new building.

Gov. Hunt arrived in Hot Springs by helicopter following an address to a meeting of the North Carolina Association of Educators at Mars Hill College.

Jerry Plemmons, a member of the program's board of directors, addressed the gathering, presenting a brief history of the health program and detailing efforts which made the new facility possible. Plemmons said, "This building represents 12 years of efforts to bring quality health

care to the people of Madison County. Our director, Monica Teusch, has done a heck of a job getting this project finished. She's been putting in 14 and 16-hour days getting everything ready for today." Plemmons also acknowledged the contributions of former program director Michael Norrin and architect Taylor Barnhill, who designed the medical center.

Plemmons introduced Garland Woody, a member of the board of directors representing the Hot Springs-Spring Creek area. Woody thanked the members of the building committee and Gov. Hunt and Speaker of the House Liston Ramsey for their support of the program. Woody said that he had received a call from the state budget director asking how much

money was needed to complete the project. Woody said he told the director, "The sky's the limit." Woody then introduced Ramsey, calling him the "most respected speaker in the history of the General Assembly."

Ramsey thanked Woody and told the gathering, "If you were in Raleigh, you'd find that that admiration is not unanimous." The speaker went on to tell the audience of the role Hunt had played in seeing the new medical facility completed. He said that "Jim Hunt may run for the Senate next year, but I don't know for sure because he hasn't told me what he plans to do when his term expires."

When Hunt took the microphone, he said to Ramsey, "If I should decide to run for the Senate, you'll be

the first person I tell." The governor told a different version of the story recounted by Woody. Hunt said, "The budget director asked, 'How much do you need?' and Woody replied, 'How much do you have?' The director had to call Liston to find out how much we had."

Hunt praised the efforts of the Hot Springs Health program, saying, "In 12 short years, you have done what seemed impossible to many people. You built the Hot Springs Health Program into an outstanding example of excellent community health care and this new clinic is the most recent example of your faith and hard work. Today, you have made the impossible possible."

Hunt praised the efforts of Jerry Plemmons, Monica

Teusch and Liston Ramsey and the people of Hot Springs who raised \$40,000 to fund the building project. He also noted the contribution of the Appalachian Regional Commission, which funded the project with a grant of \$180,000, and called for the ARC to be maintained by Congress.

Following the address, Hunt joined the program's board of directors for a tour of the new facility.

At the program's annual membership meeting July 25, board member Jerry Plemmons told the membership that the project was completed within its budget and on time. Board member Don Darrell told The News Record that a \$150,000 loan that the health program had planned to use to complete the building was not needed.

Garbage Pickups Cut In Marshall

Sharp cuts in Marshall's garbage pickups were scheduled by the Board of Aldermen at a meeting Monday night.

Pickups, which had been made three days a week, will henceforth be made one day a week — on Monday — for the whole town, and another day — Thursday — for the downtown area, the board decided.

On the advice of Mayor Lawrence Ponder, the board decided Monday on a motion by John Dodson and seconded by Charles Sexton, to terminate Charles Sexton as a town employee due to a cut-back in funds. Sexton has been a backhoe operator and active in water and sewer systems maintenance.

Weaverville Gets New Traffic Light

A new traffic light at Tri-City Plaza in Weaverville, at the turnoff for North Buncombe High School, should be in full operation by the time school starts, says Bill Hamlin, Traffic Service Supervisor of the Dept. of Transportation District 13.

Delay would result only if the Maintenance Dept. of DOT, which is widening the in-

tersection and putting in a new traffic control island, does not have its part of the work finished in time.

The new traffic light, and a new flasher at the intersection of Routes 25 and 70, both result from traffic engineering studies that show a high rate of accidents at those two points.

Work To Start In Walnut Creek Area

Work on Marshall's near-million-dollar sewer improvement program will start Aug. 15, with the Walnut Creek portion of the project leading off.

Decision on the project startup was reached Monday at a pre-contract meeting among Mayor Lawrence Ponder, representatives of the three contractors involved and officials of the Farmers Home

Administration, principal funding agency for the project.

Timetable for the project is 330 days, which would put completion at July 11, 1984.

A bid-opening for the project was held early in June but failed to produce the required three or more bidders. A second bid-opening on June 17 drew three bidders.

Partners Buy Woodwork Plant Site

A contract was signed Monday, The News Record has learned, looking to development of the former Oak Stoves location as a wood preparation plant that will employ 20 persons immediately and 40 within a year.

The site is being purchased

by Charles Fletcher and an unidentified partner, and is on property off the Marshall bypass developed by Jim Henderson. The new plant will chiefly handle red oak to be prepared for furniture manufacturing.

No Water Sharing, Say TVA, LOS

It is not economically feasible for the town of Mars Hill to share its water supply with the town of Marshall, a recent meeting of TVA, Land of the Sky and local officials has determined.

The larger demand for water would require a water treatment plant or filtration because water would not have the time to sit in receiving

tanks where sediment settles, officials concluded. The cost of the added equipment would make the water-sharing prohibitively expensive, Gordon Randolph told the Mars Hill town council Monday evening.

He said TVA is encouraging Mars Hill and other towns to borrow equipment to find leaks in the water system and to correct these.

Fire Depts. Get \$100,000 Funding

Madison County has received \$100,000 to fund improvements to local fire departments. Announcement received appropriations of the grants, approved by the General Assembly last month, made by Rep. Liston Ramsey, Speaker of the N.C. House, will be used to help the department complete construction of a new fire house. The West Madison Fire Department is also expected to use the funds to complete the fire station check to the West Madison V.F.D. in ceremonies held Spring Creek School. Mars Saturday morning in Spring Hill fire chief Gordon Randolph told The News Record

The West Madison V.F.D. the grant will be used to help received the largest appropria- tion, \$40,000. Ramsey department hopes to have in told The News Record on Fri- service by December.