



If These Walls Could Talk

This house was built in the early 1800's most likely by Jeremiah Buck. The photo was taken by Nathaniel Rue Ewan in the 1930's. His collection of photographs were presented to the New Jersey State Library in 1939. A similar photo album is housed at the Burlington County Library in Westampton. In 1859, the map shows Washington Hunter's house on the north side of Swedes Run on the west side of River Road. Dredge Harbor Marina purchased the property.

Washington Hunter's grandfather came from Ireland and settled in Cinnaminson Township. In 1826, he was born to William Washington Hunter and Sarah McMaster. He lived with his family until he purchased the this house and farm from Sallie Buck in 1857. In 1861, he married Sarah H. Flanigan. She was educated at the Zane Street Public School in Philadelphia. She taught school for several years before marrying Washington Hunter. They had one child, Mae who was born May 2, 1862 and died before her third birthday on December 15, 1864.

Washington Hunter was quite active in politics. He was on the Cinnaminson Township Committee in 1876. He served as Freeholder in 1878-79 and 1881-1882 representing his community - first for Cinnaminson Township and Delran after Delran was created in 1880. He was actively involved with the creation of Delran Township in 1880.

In 1901, Washington Hunter was brutally attacked in his home and subsequently died from his injuries. This account of the crime, the investigation and the trials that followed were based upon stories

published in the Philadelphia Inquirer, The Times and the Courier Post between January 27, 1901 and January 1903 which were available online. A final news story was published in the New Jersey Mirror on November 25, 1908.

Washington Hunter was alone when unknown assailants knocked at the door. His wife Sarah had already gone upstairs to bed. The men demanded his money and valuables. Washington Hunter who was 76 years old at the time, resisted. One of the men stabbed him with a chisel. Several veins were cut and there was a lot of blood. Sarah heard the commotion and rushed to help her husband who was lying in a pool of blood. She dragged him into the bedroom and sat him in a chair with his pistol ready to shoot. She grabbed a butcher knife for protection. The men pushed down the door and were met with bullets. Their farm hand Joseph Rubach was sleeping and also heard the commotion. He came in with his gun but was too late. He left to get Dr. Small to treat Mr. Hunter injuries.

Washington Hunter succumbed to his injuries on January 29, 1901. The coroner, William Wells, arrived and viewed the body. He quickly impaneled a jury of six of the most prominent citizens of Riverside. Rudolph Stecher, Warren Pine, Henry Walter, Charles Sack, John Hecker and Micheal Schlinderweine, Sr. met at 2pm on January 30, 1901.

Detective Ellis Parker visited the scene of the invasion along with Davis and Robert Hunter and Andrew Kentzinger. They found an oily rag which they assumed was used by the burglars to carry their tools. They also found a bloody hat with the letters "G. A. S." on the inside band. They believed the men left Delran and headed to Merchantville to take a trolley into Philadelphia. Later in the week, some local boys found a pair of blood stained trousers on the banks of the Delaware River near Washington Hunter's home.

Pressure was on to make an arrest. The first man arrested was Robert Jenkins age 20 who was identified as a farmhand on a farm owned by Washington Hunter's nephew which was less than a mile away. On January 30, Jenkins walked into Pennsylvania Hospital with a gunshot wound to his leg. Philadelphia detectives arrested him and called Coroner Wells so that he could question him. Jenkins told investigators that the shot was self inflicted and he dropped the gun on Strawberry Street near Market Street (Old City). Doctors also thought the wound was a few day old. He was released on February 7 after the gun was found but more importantly, when the investigators realized his wound was in the back of his leg and the shot fired by Hunter would have been in the front.

Detectives then worked to capture John Keough, a former tenet who was reported to be a "dangerous man with very bad character". For this reason, officers were told to arrest Keogh on sight. He was in Riverside the day of the crime and had disappeared. He also had the misfortune to fit the bloody hat that was found. Detectives tried to connect Jenkins and Keogh but were unsuccessful.

On February 5, 1901, another man was arrested. Robert Lee age 35 and a negro resident of Camden. Lee protested loudly and ran but was captured and taken into custody in Palmyra. The basis of his arrest - he had relatives in Riverside and had been seen in the vicinity of the Hunter homestead the night of the crime. Officials also held Frank McClay on suspicion but was expected to be released after a few days.

Prosecutor Samuel Atkinson and Mrs Hunter agreed to provide a reward for the apprehension of the men that robbed the house which lead to the death of Mr. Hunter and may lead to the death of his wife.

Detective Parker said he would investigate this matter but did not believe there is the slightest evidence against any of the suspects now under arrest. Within a week of the murder, Robert Jenkins, John Keogh, Robert Lee and Frank McClay had been arrested based on very little evidence for breaking into Washington Hunter's house which led to his death. All four were released.

It looked like this crime would remain unsolved until two prisoners confessed a few weeks after the crime on March 9. John Young and Otto Keller told detectives how the decision was made to commit this crime. The four men - Young, Keller, Charles Brown and Charles Miller became acquainted in New York City. They decided to commit the robbery some place in the country because they thought that would be easier. They came up with two locations. One of the men believed that the owner of a house on Long Island kept a large sum of money on hand. John Young had once worked for Washington Hunter and knew he lived alone with his wife and also had plenty of money. They flipped coin - heads they'd go to Long Island and tails to Riverside. It was tails. They took a ferry to Jersey City on January 25 and reached the Hunter house around midnight. According to their story, they knocked on the door and Hunter opened it. His wife was peering over his shoulder. They demanded money and a scuffle ensued. Charles Brown used a chisel to cut deep gashes into Washington Hunter. Mrs. Hunter ran for a gun and fired hitting Brown in the groin. They ran and the wounded man dropped his hat. The proceeds of this crime - an old silver watch and \$4. Keller left the group and returned to Philadelphia. The others walked to Burlington and broke into a church. In the morning, Brown bought a new cap and some crackers and cheese. The storekeeper thought he looked in pain so he looked at him closely so he could give the police a good description.

It turned out Otto Keller had sent a letter essentially confessing to the crime to authorities two weeks after the crime but little attention was given until after his confession in March.

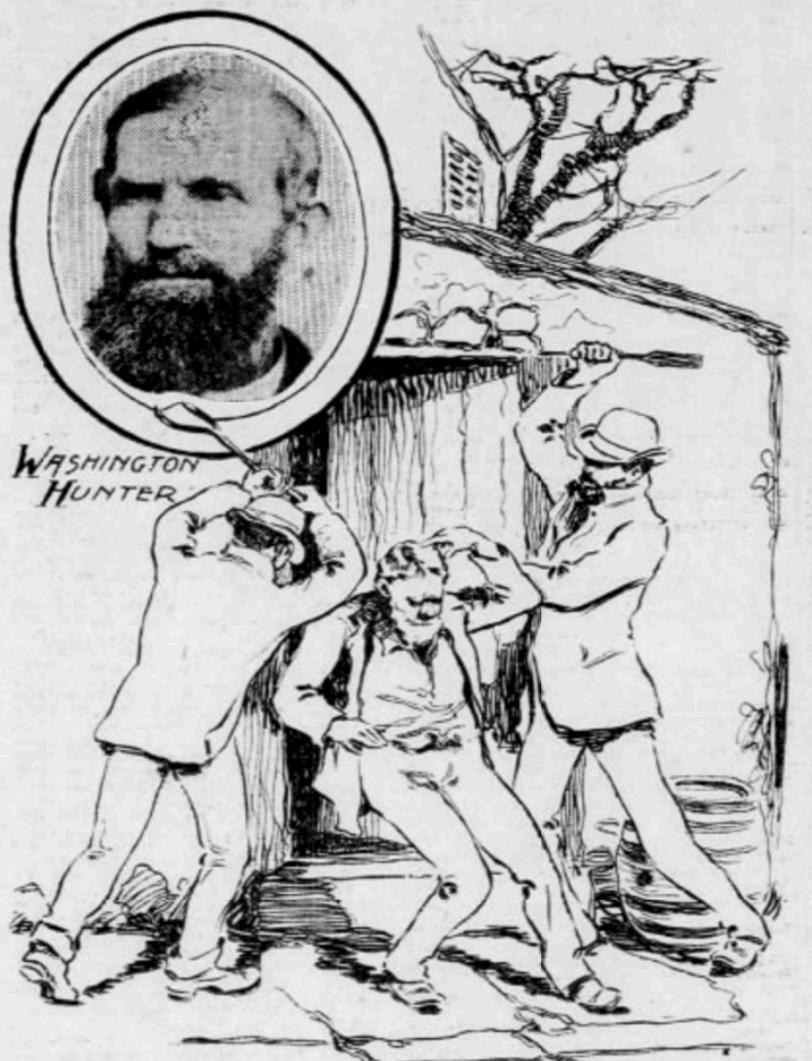
Three of the four criminals were in custody. The Grand Jury met on May 14, 1901 and returned true bills against the four men. The trial for John Young started on September 11, 1901. On September 13, he was found guilty of first degree murder. He appealed his conviction to the Court of Errors and Appeals which affirmed the conviction in January 1902. On March 18, 1902, a little more than a year later, he was hanged for his involvement in the murder of Washington Hunter.

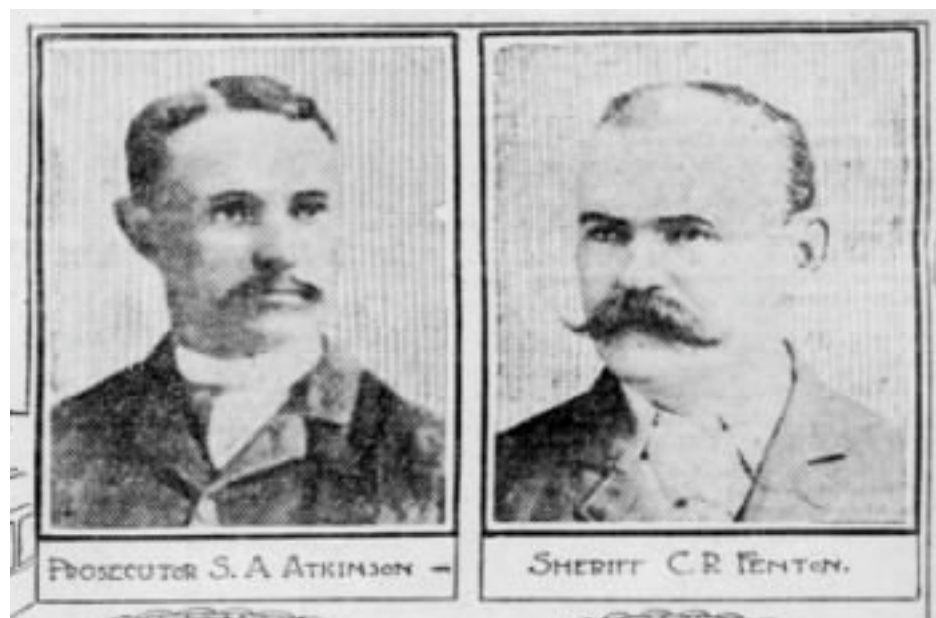
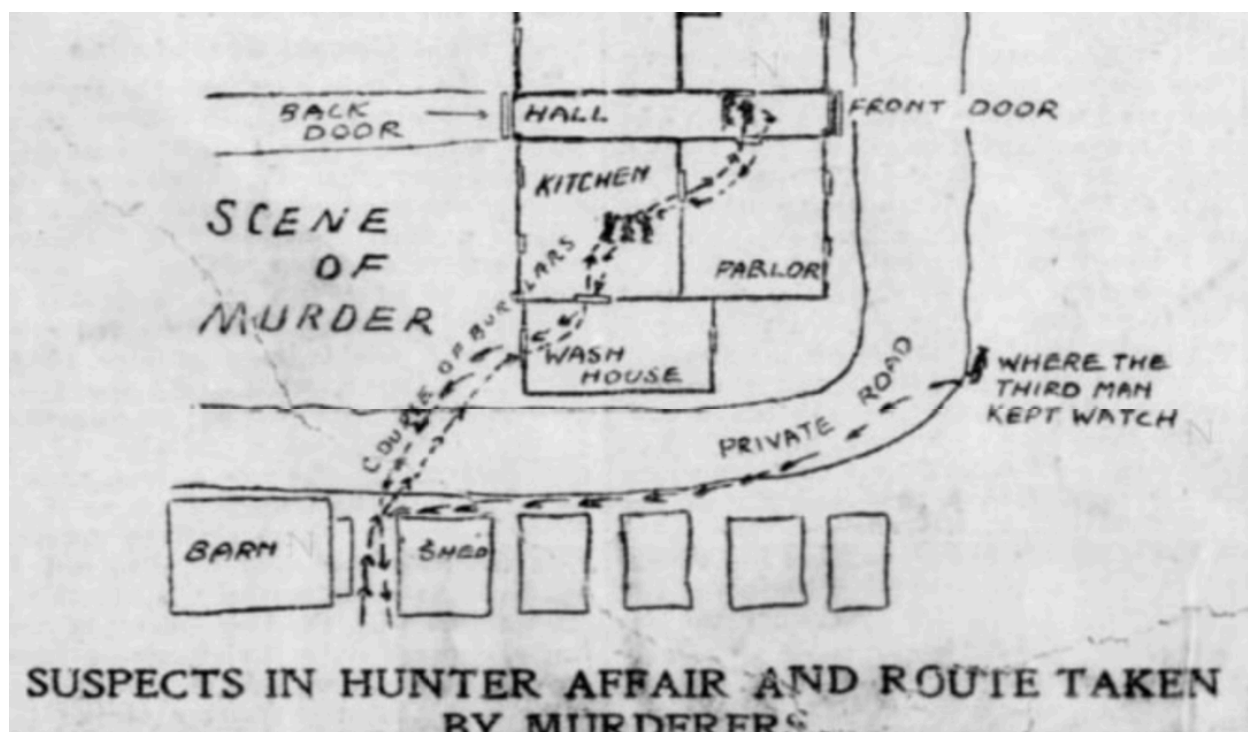
Charles Brown was brought in from Sing Sing for trial and was convicted of first degree murder on October 16, 1901. On December 3, he was scheduled to be hanged. An hour before his execution, he armed himself with a lead pipe and pushed past his spiritual advisor and tried to escape. He was captured and hanged as planned. The remains were turned over to the undertaker who took them to the cemetery adjoining the almshouse in New Lisbon.

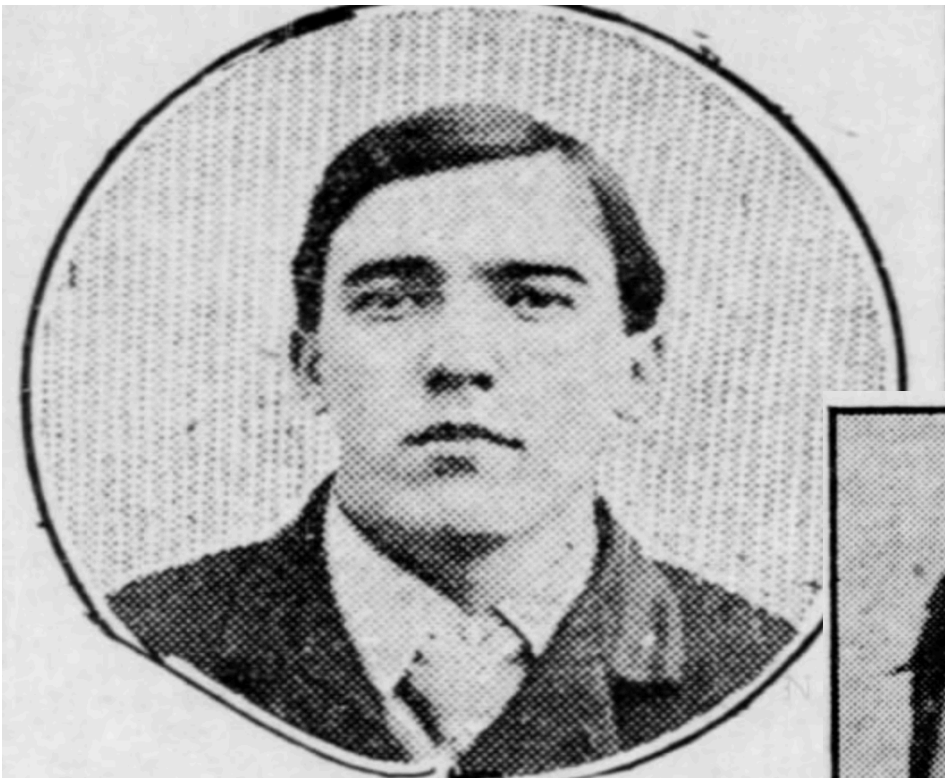
Otto Keller, turned state's evidence against the other three men. He received a 10 year sentence on January 1903. On February 25, 1908, he was released from prison.

The fourth man, Charles Miller was never arrested.

The crime and subsequent arrests and trials captured the attention of the local and regional papers. This included sketches of the suspects, criminals, the crime scene and others.







John Young



OTTO KELLER.

