

The Darker Side: Trio of Murders

By Rachel Schleichauf

For several years, historic Mississauga was seemingly quiet rural home. In short, a lovely place where citizens enjoyed the comforts of a safe community and a growing economy. This vision experienced a drastic transformation in 1967-1968 when Mississauga was witness to three successive murders.

The first murder occurred on December 21st, 1967 in what the South Peel Weekly newspaper referred to as the "Trio of Murders." 74-year-old George Hilivka Sr. fell victim to a brutal beating and was found dead in Cooksville. After extensive police investigation, his son George Hilivka Jr., 24, was charged with non-capital murder for the murder of his father. While the killing of George Sr. shook the community, citizens of historic Mississauga could not have anticipated the events that followed.

Within a month, 17-year old Karen Madigan was found strangled in her own home with a nylon stocking. Karen's body was discovered on the floor by apartment owner Charles Dewey on January 5th, 1968. The Peel County Coroner determined that Karen had been sexually assaulted and that the cause of death was by strangulation. During the investigation, the police asserted that the murderer was likely someone Karen knew since she allowed them into the apartment.

This investigation resulted in two suspects: the first was Charles Dewey, the apartment owner, who found Karen's body when attempting to repair a light fixture; another possibility was 17-year old John Graham, the basement tenant, who had also reported visiting the Madigan apartment on January 5th. On January 29th, 1968, John Graham was arrested and charged with murder. Graham, who had recently married, was defended by his wife Vera who said "John is not guilty, I will stick with him to the very end."

On April 3rd, 1968, citizens of historic Mississauga filled the courtrooms waiting to hear the much-anticipated verdict of the Madigan trial. John Graham reaffirmed his innocent stance with support from his lawyer, John Bowlby, who directed attention towards the circumstantial nature of the evidence. Bowlby argued that the evidence was equally as incriminating for apartment-owner Charles Dewey as both John Graham and Charles Dewey had reported being present in the Madigan apartment from 8am to 10am on the day of Karen's death. The trial began looking even more hopeful for John Graham following testimony from 17-year old Lynn Perrin. Perrin asserted that, on the day before Karen's death, she witnessed Charles Dewey push Karen down on the bed as a joke. Additionally, the examination did not find blood or loose hairs on Graham, despite not bathing for 24 hours prior to the murder. Following intense deliberations, an all-male jury ruled that Graham was innocent. "Mr. Graham, you are free to go," concluded Justice Patrick Hartt.

The last homicide in the Trio of Murders occurred on January 8th, 1968, just three days after the death of Karen Madigan. Mrs. Desmond Carpenter returned home to find her beloved sister Freda arguing with her estranged husband Richard McDonald. Suddenly, the argument escalated and Mrs. Carpenter ran out of the house to protect her youngest child. As she waited

for the police, four gun shots reverberated through the house. Upon hearing that, Mrs. Carpenter rushed back into her house to find her sister Freda dead with three bullet wounds: two in her head and one in her back. Richard MacDonald was semi-conscious on the floor with a self-inflicted bullet wound in his head. By January 9th, it was reported that MacDonald was "in fair condition" at Toronto Western Hospital and was charged with murder.

In January 1969, one year after the Trio of Murders, the murder of Freda Carpenter remained the only case to get resolved. Richard McDonald, 47, was convicted and jailed for eight years. In the death of George Hilivka Sr., his son George Jr. was acquitted shortly after being charged. Consequently, the culprit behind the senseless beating remained unanswered. The Madigan case also remained open following the trial. On August 20th, it was reported that John Graham received a three-and-a-half year sentence for two charges – assault occasioning bodily harm and possession of an offensive weapon. Two days following the charges, Graham was quoted in the Toronto Telegraph saying he "didn't remember leaving the Madigan girl's apartment and his mind was blank until he was in his own apartment washing his face." Although the murder of Karen Madigan was never solved, the suspicion rests on Graham.

The South Peel Weekly reported that the crime rate increased by 15-20% after 1968. The Trio of Murders contributed significantly to this dramatic increase. The South Peel Weekly speculated that an increase in population – from 107,000 to 120,000 citizens – also influenced an upsurge in crime. The paper wrote: "Chief McGill cited three other factors involved. He said more people reported crimes; there were more men to apprehend and detect criminals; and much of the increase in criminal activity revolved around the younger age group."