

Way We Were
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Dead in Her Bed
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Imagine a room like a doll-house; a clean, tidy room with nothing out of place. Lying on the bed was the body of a woman. She was partly dressed; “she had on her stockings, a low-pair of slippers, and a kimono. Her night gown was carefully folded and was under her head....The pillow had been taken from the head of the bed, and was over the woman’s head, but in a perfectly smooth condition, not the least sign to indicate that it had been used to smother.”¹

The woman, Clara Maybell Huey, aged 24, had been staying in one of Rachel Urban’s “cribs” in the red light district on Heber Avenue. Having not seen her since Monday night, Urban and others contacted the police.

The front door of the residence had been bolted, but the back door was open. There was no sign of foul play. The woman was known to keep a revolver in her room, as well as some money, but neither was found during the investigation. The autopsy failed to reveal the cause of death, and an analysis of the stomach found no evidence of poison. If murdered, why was the woman’s body laid out so perfectly on the bed, with not a thing displaced? If it was a natural death, why was there a pillow over her face, and all her money gone?

The first to be questioned was Clara’s husband, James “Cupid” Huey, a Salt Lake City taxicab driver. He had been in Park City the week before, and it was said that he and his wife had quarreled. He was in Salt Lake that Monday night, but received a call to go to Kamas around 11:00 pm. He denied being in Park City that night, and claimed he did not return to Salt Lake until about 6:00 am, as a result of being stuck in mud and snow near Wanship. He claimed that his wife was “subject to spells during which she found breathing extremely difficult.”²

Rachel Urban testified as well. She said she knew nothing about the death, but claimed to hear “a big automobile turn around in front of her house and drive rapidly away about 4 o’clock Tuesday morning.”³

Frequent visitor of Mrs. Huey, Salt Lake City wrestler Lawrence Buys, admitted to being in her company on the night of her death. He and his brother Frank then went to get something to eat, and left early the next morning for Salt Lake. Three bloodstained handkerchiefs and a collar were found in Buys suitcase; he acknowledged that they were his, but claimed he didn’t know how they became bloodstained. Buys and his brother were charged with first degree murder within the month.

A month later, the Buys brothers were acquitted of murder due to lack of evidence. Could it have truly been a case of death by natural causes? We may never know.

¹ Park Record, “Mysterious Death of ‘Crib’ Habitué.” November 7, 1919.

² Salt Lake Telegram, “Inquest Ordered in Woman’s Death.” November 6, 1919.

³ Park Record, “Mysterious Death of ‘Crib’ Habitué.” November 7, 1919.

The Park City Historical Society & Museum is celebrating 30 years of preserving, protecting, and promoting Park City's history and heritage.



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Caption: The mysterious death of Clara Huey rattled the inhabitants of Park City in the winter of 1919. Although not a photograph of Clara's room, one can imagine her's looking similar to this.