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Sheppard Case Parallels Ohio Nesbitt Slaying of '26

Claws of suspicion, moved by damning circumstance, closed tightly last July about Dr. Samuel H. Sheppard, just as they clamped shut 28 years ago on Jacob Nesbitt of Troy, O.

A generation apart, the two men had many things in common, but mostly this—the wife of each was murdered.

The brutal slaying of Nesbitt's wife was Ohio's mystery sensation of the middle '20s.

The similarity of circumstances in the two crimes is spine tingling.

Dr. Sheppard is 30. That was Nesbitt's age also.

Where Dr. Sam's wife was an athletic person, so was Jake

protective screen thrown up by his family which kept him in Bay View Hospital beyond the grasp of police eager to question him.

In Troy, police were hampered and thrown off track because before they arrived neighbors and friends came into the Nesbitt place, washed dishes, made coffee, tidied the rooms and moved furniture.

Robbery was ruled out as a motive in Troy, there being no evidence of anything being stolen. Nor was there any indication of a sex crime.

Similar motives also were excluded in the Sheppard case.

Murder Weapon Missing

The murder weapon was missing from the Nesbitt home, even as it was from the Sheppard house beside the lake.

Suspicion mourned so quickly against Nesbitt that he retained a prominent attorney, L. H. Shipman.

Cleveland's noted criminal lawyer, William J. Corrigan, was called in by the Sheppard family within hours of the slaying of Marilyn.

One of Shipman's first acts was to assert Nesbitt was under severe nervous strain and was in no condition to undergo questioning.

Corrigan also stood in the way of detectives, the astute Cleveland lawyer armed with medical claims that Dr. Sam was seriously injured.

Proclaim Client's Innocence

Attorney Shipman proclaimed his clients innocence. So did Attorney Corrigan.

Finally both Dr. Sam and Jake Nesbitt made statements about events leading up to the murders.

Nesbitt and his counsel, Dr. Sam and his, saw that before them were bitter fights to break down prejudice, suspicion and unfortunate circumstance.

As for the investigation at Troy, there was no co-ordination for a full week. It was just like Bay Village before Cleveland police stepped in and took over, nearly three weeks after the crime.

Nine days after Frances Nesbitt was brained the probers said they were "reasonably sure" they knew the identity of her murderer.

Officials Are Wary

They made no arrest, they said, because the suspect could be had at any time. On that account there was no hurry, they insisted.

But in the background was this fact: The officials were wary of habeas corpus proceedings by Nesbitt's attorney and

was missing from the Nesbitt cottage.

Unaccounted for was a pair of blue pajamas which belonged to Jake.

The Sheppards had a dog, KoKo, which gave no alarm as his mistress died. Dr. Sheppard explained that KoKo was not the barking kind.

And the Nesbitts had a dog, a huge airedale called Rowdy. This dog could not help its mistress because on weekdays it was kept at the home of Frances Nesbitt's mother. The Nesbitts had the dog each week end.

"If Rowdy had been at our house the day of the murder nothing could have happened to Frances," Nesbitt remarked, telling how the dog became ferocious when anyone would menace his wife.

Three weeks to the day after his wife was slain, Jake Nesbitt confessed. Officials said he displayed relief.

The brilliance of the detective work—chiefly by Ora Slater, the storied private eye—need not be related here.

Jake said Frances nagged—about business affairs, about social matters.

He said he was seized by "red fury."

They quarreled the night of Feb. 18 and went to bed without making up.

In the morning they started bickering again. They were still in night clothes standing in the living room when the "red fury" descended. He grabbed and choked her. She was athletic and struggled free.

Jake struck—probably with missing silver vase, he did not remember. Authorities found nothing gone, but Jake knew the vase was missing.

He Struck Twice

Twice he struck, and the second time she went down. He carried her to her bed, then to the bathroom. The "red fury" went away.

She had drawn water for a bath. He put her in it. He tried to revive her. It was no use.

Deliberately he planned to defeat the law.

He burned the bloody blue pajamas he had worn. He carried away the weapon in a box from the kitchen. He went to business in Dayton and began three weeks of acting—masterly acting—with terror of the law as his stage director.

Nesbitt pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to life. After nine years he won a parole. He got married again and went into business. He died last March 31.

In its suspicion of Jake Nesbitt the public might have been wrong but was not. This year the public unfolded Dr. Sam Sheppard with suspicion equally intense. The public can be right—and it can be wrong. Whichever is the case, a jury now has spoken. W. H.



FRANCES NESBITT

Nesbitt's. She was Frances Drake Nesbitt, former Ohio State University tennis star.

Both Couples Popular

As were the Sheppards, the Nesbitts were gay and popular members of a "country club" set.

Both couples were "doing well," getting up in the community. That was, until the wives were murdered.

Sam Sheppard played football as a high school student. Nesbitt played football in high school and college, too. Once in a game at Lima he was knocked unconscious and was out of his head for three weeks.

Where Sam and Marilyn Sheppard were high school sweethearts, Jake and Frances Nesbitt were sweethearts from childhood through college.

Outsiders regarded the Sheppards and the Nesbitts as ideally married couples.

Retired Separately

On the night of Feb. 18, 1926, Frances Nesbitt retired to the bed in the bedroom of their cottage home at Troy.

Nesbitt retired on a couch in the living room. The couch had been fixed up as a bed the previous night for some house guests—a married couple who had been college friends of the Nesbitts.

The Sheppards likewise had a house guest before the tragedy—Dr. Lester Hoversten, a college friend of Dr. Sam.

The morning of Feb. 19, Nesbitt said, he rose at 7, left his wife in bed and went to Dayton. Late that night he returned not to his home but to the residence of his mother-in-law. He was told Frances was not there.

Finds Wife's Body

Jake Nesbitt then went to his home, found the door unlocked and his wife's body in the bathtub.

There were two great gashes in her head. Her throat showed the imprints of a strangler.

The authorities looked at Frances and said she died from wounds inflicted by a killer with "uncontrollable rage."

That was the same conclusion which was reached by officials who looked at the pulpified head of Marilyn Sheppard.

In Troy the authorities also concluded that Frances Nesbitt's slayer never entered the house intending to kill. In Bay Village they felt the same about the killer of Marilyn Sheppard.

As in Troy, so in Bay, the officials were hampered in the early phases of their investigations.

In Dr. Sam's case it was a

of preliminary hearings where they would be compelled to reveal trump cards.

Fearful of a habeas corpus writ—and of false arrest lawsuits—some officials in the Sheppard investigation similarly hesitated about making an arrest.

Right from the start, a key-stone of the Bay Village mystery was Dr. Sam's missing white T-shirt, which he was wearing on the eve of his wife's death.

After eight days it developed that an article of clothing also



JACOB NESBITT