

# Maniac in the Bushes

by John Stark Bellamy II

## Author Bio:

John Stark Bellamy II is the author of a number of books about Cleveland crime and disaster. The former history specialist for the Cuyahoga County Public Library, he comes by his taste for the sensational honestly, having grown up reading stories about Cleveland crime and disaster written by his grandfather, Paul, who was editor of the Plain Dealer, and his father, Peter, who wrote for the Cleveland News and the Plain Dealer. ([http://www.grayco.com/cleveland/authors/bellamy-john/author.shtml#\\_UkyLYZK1GSo](http://www.grayco.com/cleveland/authors/bellamy-john/author.shtml#_UkyLYZK1GSo))

John Stark Bellamy II has also authored his first e-book for the Cleveland Digital Library of Cleveland State University Library's Special Collections of the Cleveland Memory Project (it's their first e-book as well). It's titled *By the Neck Until Dead* (<http://www.clevelandmemory.org/speccoll/bellamy/>) and it is a history of hangings that have taken place in Cuyahoga County. If you click on the title, you will find yourself at the beginning of the book which you may read online. It will not be published in paper form. It is the seventh in a series of books on murder and mayhem in Cleveland.

(<http://www.heightslibrary.org/wordpress/cerebralrat/?p=123>)

## Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the vignette, serialized nature of the Kingsbury Run Torso Murders stories? Did it add to the book or detract?
2. Is the difference between a "12 o'clock girl and a 9 o'clock husband" enough of a reason to murder your husband with a hammer? Is a change from city to rural life enough of a reason for murder?
3. What do you think about the idea that moral depravity can be observed/foreseen by a woman smoking in public?
4. Why do you think Velma went to Mabel's party and became the life of the gala after she killed her husband with a hammer?
5. Do you think of the sensationalist journalism surrounding Velma affected her trial? Why would this murder be so interesting to the public?
6. What, if anything, could have been done to prevent or ameliorate (lessen) the effects of the Lakeview Elementary School fire?
7. Once police identified the dismembered body of Edward Andressy, did they too easily dismiss the two men's deaths (which would later be identified as the first Torso murders) as "misadventure" and a result of the victims' past actions?
8. Do you think Ihlenfeld killed Foote and Wolf? Did Parma and Cleveland police rush to judgment or overreact to the publicity and sensationalism of the crime?
9. Why do people confess to crimes they don't commit?
10. Do you think Blinky Morgan committed the crimes for which he was hung? Why didn't Blinky speak up in his own defense?

11. Was there anything police officers could have done to prevent the circumstances leading to Hulligan's murder?
12. How likely do you find the theory that Clara Ziechmann and Carl Berntahaler were killed by someone stalking Clara?
13. Why would someone hide under a bed or resist leaving their room if the building they were in caught on fire, as happened in the Asylum fire?
14. Who do you think shot and killed J. J. Phillips?
15. Why did Phillip's statement and the facts not match? What do you think really happened?
16. Martha Wise confessed to killing her mother, aunt, and uncle. Why do you think the press and the courts were so easy on her?
17. Why did the police try so hard to apprehend and convict the gang involved in the Sly-Fanner murders? Do you think this dogged prosecution helped Cleveland's reputation?
18. Why were the murder of Janet Blood and the disappearance of Beverly Potts so traumatizing to the people of Cleveland?
19. In trying to stop the Torso murders, Elliot Ness rousts and burns down three hobo shantytowns. If you cannot find a murderer, is trying to get rid of potential victims a good way to stop future deaths?
20. Most of the Torso murderer's victims were never identified. Do you think that could happen in current day Cleveland or has forensics evolved too far?
21. Why did the public begin to lose interest in the Torso Murders around the 10<sup>th</sup> victim?
22. Do you think the "Lady of the Lake" was killed by the Torso murderer?
23. The Torso murderer is identified as having 13 victims, but there are many more victims in nearby areas whose deaths are similar. What do you think is the actual number of Torso victims? Is there any way to know?
24. Do you agree with the author that, because decapitation is so easy, that there was likely more than 1 Torso Murderer?
25. Why were the murders, deaths, and mysteries recorded in this book highlighted instead of others that might have occurred during the same time period?
26. How do newspapers and news reporting effect the publicity and sensationalization of the same crime happening to different people?

## Character List:

✚ Victim

• Bystander

➤ Accused Murderer

- *Velma West* – “12 o’clock girl” who killed her husband with a hammer.
- ✚ *Eddie West* – “9 o’clock husband” resident of rural Perry who was killed by his wife.
- *Mabel Young* – Friend of Velma West.
- *Clarence Darrow* – One of the most famous American lawyers and civil libertarians. Began his career in Youngstown and NE Ohio.
- *Fritz Hirter* – Janitor at Lakeview Elementary at the time of the fire.
- ✚ *Edward Andrassy* – Male victim of the Torso killer – 1935. First victim identified. A ne’er-do-well living with his parents.
- ✚ *Louise Wolf* – Parma principal beaten to death by a “maniac in the bushes.”
- ✚ *Mabel Foote* – Parma teacher beaten to death by a “maniac in the bushes.”
- *Arthur Ihlenfeld* – Mentally challenged individual who admitted to Wolf and Foote murders. Declared insane and committed.
- *Charles “Blinky” Morgan* – Career criminal hung in 1888 for the murder of one police officer and assault on a second during the criminal transport of an associate. Was in jail multiple times and escaped. His most famous escapade began with a fur store robbery.
- *Martin “Charlie” Lowry* – criminal associate of Blinky Morgan.
- *Nellie Lowry* – Martin Lowry’s wife. Lover of Blinky Morgan.
- ✚ *William Hulligan* – Officer killed by Blinky Morgan.
- *Henry Hoehn* – Officer hurt by Morgan in breakout. Hunted for Morgan after assault. Eventually became chief of police.
- ✚ *Carl Bernthaler* – A music teacher. Shot in the back and killed with Clara Ziechmann.
- ✚ *Clara Ziechmann* – A music student. Shot in the back and killed with Carl Bernthaler. Had a very controlling father. Other terrifying “incidents” happened to her previous to her murder.
- *Samuel Gerber* – Coroner in Cleveland working on the Torso murders in 1937.
- *Elliot Ness* – Safety Director of Cleveland at the time of the Torso Murders.
- ✚ *Janet Blood* – 16-year-old shot and killed by “the Fiend” during a mugging and a string of assaults on women in 1930.
- ✚ *Rose Wallace*, presumably, the 9<sup>th</sup> victim of Kingbury Run butcher.
- ✚ *J. J. Phillips* – Shot in his home. Died hours later. Details of the shooting provided proved to be lies. In financial trouble.

- *Charlotte Phillips* – J.J. Phillips wife.
- *Ethel Phillips* – The Phillips' adopted daughter. Witness who corroborated her father's deathbed facts recital.
- *Martha Wise* – Hypochondriac, with a "cluttered brain," who loved funerals. Started barn fires and stole from her neighbors. May have poisoned her husband with arsenic in 1923. Poisoned and killed her mother in 1924 and her aunt and uncle in 1925. 14 poisoned family members became sick and some permanently maimed.
- ✚ *Wilfred Sly* – owner of the W.W. Sly Manufacturing Company. Well-liked by his employees. Killed by thieves after the payroll money.
- ✚ *George Fanner* – Superintendent of the W. W. Sly Company. Killed by thieves after the payroll money.
- *Louis Kolmer* – "The Toledo Kid." May have been an ex-employee of the Sly Manufacturing Company. Worked with Motto to rob and kill Sly and Fanner. Got life in prison.
- *Frank Motto* – Part of the Notorious Serra Gang (car thieves), he needed money for legal matters. Worked with Kolmer to rob and kill Sly and Fanner. Executed.
- *Sam Purpera* – Sixteen(?) year-old who worked with Motto and Kolmer to rob and kill Sly and Fanner. Drove the car that pushed the Sly-Fanner car off the road. Executed.
- *Edward Sweeny* – A down-and-out, alcoholic doctor, interviewed by Ness, as a possible Torso Murderer suspect. No facts supported his supposition. Sweeny spent the rest of his life in and out of institutions.
- *Frank Dolezal* – Male nurse. Suspected by the Cuyahoga County Sheriff's office of being the Torso Murderer. Treated badly and gave a false(?) confession. Eventually hung himself while being held for trial.
- ✚ *Beverly Potts* – 10 year old girl who disappeared at Halloran park during a singing and dancing performance. No trace of her was ever found.

## **Other Information:**

### **The "Mad Butcher" of Kingsbury Run; Torso Murders Timeline:**

- 1934 – Torso of unidentified woman found. "The Lady of the Lake." Possible Torso Murder victim.
- 1935 – Two dismembered male bodies found. One identified as Edward Andrassy. Second remains unidentified.
- Jan 1936 – Dismembered woman identified as Florence Polillo. She was a woman of "ill-repute." Her head was never found.

- June 1936 – Unidentified dismembered man. Head found near body.
- July 1936 – Dismembered, unidentified man found in Big Creek. Killed a couple of months before it was found. Only West side Torso murder.
- September 1936 – Torso of unidentified man found. Head and other parts never recovered.
- February 1937 – Torso of an unidentified woman found in Lake. Head, legs, and arms never found.
- June 1937 – Dismembered body of (presumably) Rose Wallace, a black woman, was found. She was killed between March-September of 1936.
- July 1937 – Dismembered, unidentified male body found in Cuyahoga River. Head never found.
- April - May 1938 – Leg found in the Cuyahoga river in April. The rest of the remains of the woman were found in May. Much cruder dissection than in the past.
- August 1938 – Female torso & other pieces found. Male victim also found. Victims never identified. These are the last identified Torso murder victims.

#### **Murder and Disaster Timeline and Facts:**

- Northern Ohio Insane Asylum Fire – 1872. Probably started by workers fixing the roof.
  - 6 fatalities – probably from the water towers falling through the floor.
  - Asylum was looted by locals during the fire.
  - Many patients were later found wandering the area.
  - A second fire happened in 1887 killing 7 women.
- Bold, Bad “Blinky” Morgan – 1887-1888 – Full-time criminal – Police officer killed during an escape.
- J. J. Phillips Mystery – 1907
  - Shot in his home on the stairs up to his bedroom
  - Did not call a doctor or the police for several hours after the shooting.
- Clara Ziechmann and Carl Berntahaler – March 1908 – Murdered while walking together. No suspects.
- Lakeview Elementary School Fire:
  - Occurred in March 1908
  - All classrooms had around 40 students
  - 172 out of 350 children and 3 adults died in the fire
  - In contrast to stories reported at the time, the school doors opened outward.
- Sly-Fanner Payroll Murders – 1920 – Killed for payroll money

- Foote-Wolf Murder – 1921 – Parma Teachers (*Maniac in the Bushes*)
- Martha Wise – 1925 – Poisoner
- 12 o'clock girl in a 9 o'clock town murder – 1927 – Killed husband with a hammer.
- Janet Blood – 1930 – Random attacks on women – Murdered walking down street. Appeared random.
  - There was probably at least 2 “Fiends” attacking woman.
  - Edward Ralph was caught and convicted of other assaults, but he did not shoot Janet Blood.
- Beverly Potts Mystery – 1951 to ? – 10 year-old girl who disappeared.
  
- Cleveland fires – 1883-1914; 1961
  - 1883 Standard Oil Fire – February – A Standard Oil drum leaked into an already flooded Kingsbury Run creek. The oil caught on fire and raced back to the Oil tank field, where the tanks (9 of them) started to blow up, sending fire down the creek and toward the river and the flats.
  - 1884 Flats Lumber Fire – Someone set the Cleveland lumberyards on Fire. Then two weeks later, did it again. Had to call in firefighters from neighboring areas.
  - 1914 Fisher-Wilson Inferno – Fire started by arson at the Fisher-Wilson lumberyards. Burned down the Central Viaduct bridge (one of Cleveland’s main thoroughfares).

**Other notes:**

Capital punishment is currently legal in Ohio. Since 1885, a total of 489 individuals have been executed in Ohio. On April 1, 2013, there were 147 people under a sentence of death in Ohio. The current method of execution in Ohio is lethal injection.

As with all other states, people who are under 18 at the time of commission of the capital crime or mentally handicapped are constitutionally precluded from being executed.

**References:**

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