

# BANDITS KILL, THEN ROB MAN

## MURDER RALPH G. ESMOND FOR FEW DOLLARS IN PURSE

Killers, as ruthless as they are vicious, are abroad in the county.

Discovery of the murdered body of Ralph G. Esmond, aged 31, and a prominent La Sallean, on the concrete highway

### INQUEST REVEALS ESMOND WAS SLAIN AND NOT A SUICIDE

Just over the crest of Dimmick Hill, Saturday night, has borne home to officialdom, the certainty that these wolves in human form have infested a territory heretofore thought immune to their brutality and bloodthirstiness.

Mr. Esmond was shot down in cold blood for the few dollars he carried on his person. The bullet, with its message of tragedy, sped thru his victim's heart and left what had been the living animated man of a few seconds before a dead and lifeless thing sprawled out on the concrete for passers by to discover. The wolves, like their four-legged counterparts, sped from the scene to save their necks from the well known cracking that comes with the hapman's jerk of the death trap rope.

CORONER'S JURY ON STRENGTH OF AUTOPSY EVIDENCE GIVEN BY DR. BURROWS ASCRIBES VICTIM'S DEATH TO MURDER.

La Salle, Dec. 18.—(Special.)—Ralph G. Esmond was murdered.

This morning, following an inquest into the tragedy of Saturday night, wherein the Chicago Motor club representative's lifeless body, pierced by a bullet in the heart, was found on the concrete road near Dimmick hill, it took six men just that many minutes to announce that Esmond was brutally killed and under no circumstance could he possibly have been a suicide.

Helped in their decision by Dr. T. W. Burrows, of Ottawa, who testified that death came instantly to Esmond as he tried to defend himself against an attack by bandits, the jurors, after Coroner Donahue passed shirking witnesses, retired and in no time hardly were back with a verdict ascribing death to murder.

Crowd Attends. The inquest was held in Keegan's undertaking parlor at 11 o'clock. The investigation lasted an hour and twenty minutes and was attended by a crowd that packed the undertaking parlors.

All the people who gathered about the body after its discovery on the lonely spot above Dimmick hill, were brought into full what they know of the killing. None of them could throw any light on who the murderers might be. They told only of finding the body, the position it lay in when found and the location of the auto, the papers, the gun and other details essential to completion of the inquest.

Harold Esmond, strengthened the testimony of Dr. Burrows, who flatly refused to entertain any suicide theory, that the dead man was killed by highwaymen, when he told the jurors that the revolver found near the scene had never been the property of his brother. The weapon, he said, was not Ralph's nor had he even seen him with a gun that looked like that one.

Gun Not Dead Man's

In giving his expert testimony Dr. Burrows recounted the results of the autopsy and said that the bullet pierced his victim's heart and that death came the instant it struck. He scoffed at any other conclusion than the death of Esmond was out and out murder. He could not have thrown the revolver when it was later picked up, because the moment he was wounded life passed out. The gun, he said, would have been found either at or under the body.

The funeral of Mr. Esmond will be held Tuesday afternoon at 2 o'clock from the home. Interment will be in Oakwood cemetery.

The shooting, as evidenced by the finding of Mr. Esmond's lifeless remains, occurred at about 6:15 o'clock, in the midst of an attempt on the victim's part to repair some tire trouble to his automobile. The tire front wheel was on jacks, and the tire tool lay nearby.

It was apparent that Esmond, escorted by the killers had been ordered to throw up his hands, but instead he left his work and advanced toward the armed men. His body was found several feet from the machine, lying face downward, with a tell-tale bullet hole in the forehead and vest. The bullet also penetrated the upper arm.

Twenty-five feet from the corpse a revolver, of .32-caliber was found in the ditch, where evidently it had been hurled by the murderers, who feared, probably they would be caught with the weapon in their possession and cast it from them.

The position of the bullet hole indicates that the victim's overcoat was buttoned when the shots were fired, but was open when he was found.

The print of a man's finger was found on the running board of Esmond's car from which the officers have been able to secure an excellent reproduction. This could not have been made by Esmond's finger, as he wore his gloves all the time.

Papers which had been taken from the dead man's pocket, a \$1 bill and his cordova leather bill fold were found in the ditch five feet nearer the car. The money is believed to have been overlooked by the murderer as he sorted through the papers.

Make Clean Getaway.

The castards who fired the fatal shot succeeded in making a clean getaway, shrouding the cold blooded murder in mystery and giving the local authorities very little to work on for their apprehension. It is believed, however, that the guilty person or persons traveled in a car which they had stolen in La Salle about thirty minutes before shooting down their unfortunate victim.

News of the crime spread throughout the county quickly and stirred the community as no other murder since the famous Black Hollow case. A statewide search for the killers has been started. The Chicago Motor club broadcasted the news of the vilest crime through the state and asked that every city join in searching for the slayer.

One of the first clues followed up was that the fugitive traveled in a Dodge coupe belonging to H. E. Black of La Salle. This car was stolen from in front of the Neustadt building in La Salle between 5:55 and 6:05 Saturday evening.

Suspected Team

# DW ESMOND KILLER; ARRESTED

## PERU POLICE NAB YOUTH ON WAY TO RAILWAY STATION

Peru, Dec. 26. — (Special.) — Walter F. Lopatka, aged 21, of Peru, was placed under arrest today for an investigation in connection with <sup>the</sup> Esmond murder case.

This was the first formal arrest that has been made in the case.

Lopatka is alleged to have passed a remark to a friend yesterday that he "knew who killed Esmond." The friend became alarmed and reported the alleged occurrence to the police.

The officers started to round Lopatka up, as soon as they learned he was accused of having made such a statement. They located him at 2 A. M. this morning. At that time he is said to have had his suit case, and to have been preparing to leave town.

Lopatka was turned over to Sheriff E. J. Welter for further investigation today. He denied to the Peru police having made such a remark after having been taken in custody.

### Officials Work Tirelessly.

Throughout the Christmas holiday season, the La Salle county officials worked unceasingly on the Esmond murder case, without reaching any solution to the baffling situation up to today.

Following a prolonged questioning on Saturday and Saturday night, Ernest Ashley, one of the men who found the body, and his alleged companion in a wife, Mrs. Alice Ashley, were placed under arrest and locked in the county jail on a charge of living in open adultery. Warrants for the arrest of the two were signed by Sheriff E. J. Welter.

In spite of the vehement denials of the county officials that the pair were held on any charge, rumors concerning the names of the couple with the case spread thruout the county late Saturday and grew in proportions over Sunday and Monday. Officials branded these rumors as unfounded on every hand, but were unable to keep them from spreading like wild fire thruout the county.

### Sticks To Story.

This morning they stated that in spite of frequent questionings which occurred both before and after Ashley was taken to the county jail, he had not varied in his testimony given at the coroner's inquest, nor had he made any statements that would throw any additional light on the baffling affair.

Ashley's mother from Peoria visited him on Friday. She left Ottawa on the 2:20 A. M. train for home on Saturday morning. The officials questioned her, and it is said, extracted information which led them to believe that Ashley and Mrs. Alice Ashley were living together without benefit of clergy.

### Woman Questioned.

Early Saturday afternoon Mrs. Ashley was called into the State's Attorneys office for a questioning. The investigation was conducted behind closed doors. It is alleged that she confessed to the authorities while in the State's Attorneys office that she and Ernest Ashley had never been united in lawful wedlock, and that she was just his common law wife.

She was taken in charge on a warrant secured by Sheriff Welter for this alleged offense, and was given a cell at the county jail. Ashley was then summoned to the State's Attorneys office. He too is alleged to have admitted to the authorities that he was not married.

A further check was then made on the story of the murder, as told by Ashley, but it is claimed no additional light was shed on the matter.

He was placed in jail late Saturday night, where he was held until today, when arrangements were made for giving both him and Mrs.

# SHIFTS FROM MURDER TO SUICIDE

## REVOLVER TRACED TO BASEMENT OF DEAD MAN'S HOME

A radical change came in the quest today for some solution of the tragic death on Dimmick hill of Ralph Esmond. The scenes were radically

shifted from the possibilities of murder to the probabilities of suicide

following uncovering of two important facts in connection with the baffling mystery.

It has almost been definitely established that the bullet which killed Esmond was fired from his own gun. State's Attorney Kelly and Sheriff E. J. Welter today revealed the sensational turn taken by the investigation today.

First they made known that they had traced the revolver, found lying twenty-five feet from Mr. Esmond's body, to the basement of the building where he lived at the time he was killed; and second, that Mr. Esmond's watch, which was at first believed to have been stolen by bandits, was found fifty feet from where his dead body lay.

**Facts Kept From Public.**  
The authorities have been in possession of these facts for several days, they stated today, but have refused to make them public before.

No further information was obtained about the gun other than that it was stored in the basement of the Noonan Building where Mr. Esmond, and his wife resided for the past two years on the second floor.

The revolver was in the basement there several months ago.

An examination of Mr. Esmond's watch today, showed that while the face containing the sapphire had been broken, as though it had been thrown, the glass crystal was still in good position. One hand, however, was broken at the watch and was broken at the face. The hour hand was stopped shortly after 1 o'clock.

The watch was found fifty feet from the body, on the south side of the concrete highway. The revolver was found twenty-five feet nearer Mr. Esmond, and south of the concrete road.

**Stage Well Set. If Suicide.**  
In case Esmond's death was due to suicide, the stage setting was one of the best and most baffling imaginable. While previous cases have been recorded of men walking some distance with a hole thru their heart, it was not generally believed that it could have been possible for a man to shoot himself thru the heart, and then throw a gun a distance of twenty five feet.

Drs. Burrows and Parr, at an autopsy performed after the body was removed to the undertaking rooms, declared that it would have been impossible for Mr. Esmond to have killed himself.

Before this verdict was given by the physicians, some of the officials had expressed the opinion that the death was due to suicide. All theory of self-destruction was then abandoned, and the murder motive has been untiringly worked on ever since.

The disclosure of those facts gave rise to the theory that possibly Esmond was not the victim of robbery or of foul play, as has generally been supposed up to the present time. The coroner's jury, after thoroughly investigating the death, returned a verdict of murder.

**Watch in Running Condition.**  
Esmond's watch was in good running order on Friday. At that time he had about \$15.00 in his pocket, so far as the authorities have been able to determine. Among his papers near his dead body was found a lone \$1 bill.

The watch was found at the side of the highway. How it could be loaned with such force that the face could

4/23/23

# ESTATE OF MURDER VICTIM IS FILED TODAY FOR PROBATE

HEIRS OF RALPH ESMOND, WHO MET TRAGIC DEATH ON DIMMICK HILL START COURT PROCEEDINGS TO SETTLE UP DEAD MAN'S AFFAIRS.

The will of the late Ralph B. Esmond of La Salle, who on the night of December 16, was found dead at the top of Dimmick Hill, with a bullet wound through the heart, was filed for probate today. Mr. Esmond's estate all will go to his widow, Mrs. Catherine Esmond, by the terms of his will.

A petition which was filed with the will, stated that he left real estate in La Salle and Fulton counties valued at \$15,000 and a salary from the Chicago Motor Club and notes worth \$1,122.59, making his total holdings at the time of his death worth \$16,122.59.

The will was drawn October 2, 1922, and was witnessed by O. M. Benson and George W. Hasselman, both of La Salle. The widow is named as executrix. Mr. Esmond's mother, Mrs. Florence Esmond, and his brothers, Wright and Harold Esmond, filed an appearance consenting to an immediate hearing.

Mr. Esmond's death caused one of the most exhaustive criminal searches ever conducted in La Salle county. He was found lying dead in front of his coupe. A revolver was found close by, by which he had been shot.

It was supposed that he had been robbed and murdered. The search continued for a month, and then halted when the revolver by which he was shot was traced to the basement of his home, and his watch, which was missing, and was thought to have been taken by the thieves was found nearby.

Attorney J. E. Malone has been employed by the Esmond family to settle up the estate.