



J.R. GALLOWAY

THE
SERVANT GIRL
MURDERS

AUSTIN, TEXAS 1885



The Servant Girl Murders is a must-read for fans of true crime, historical mysteries, and the old west. The setting is Austin, Texas, 1885.

During the course of that year, six women, one man, and one child were murdered in their sleep by a silent, axe-wielding killer. Many more were attacked and the police were seemingly powerless to stop the crimes.

Who was responsible for the murders? How were they able to escape detection and capture? And why did they suddenly stop?

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by J.R. Galloway

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**THE SERVANT GIRL
MURDERS**

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PRIMARY SOURCE COMPILATION

January 1, 1885.

Austin Daily Statesman.

BLOODY WORK. A FEARFUL MIDNIGHT MURDER ON WEST PECAN -- MYSTERY AND CRIME. A Colored Woman Killed Outright, and Her Lover Almost Done for. No Clue to the Perpetrator of the Bloody Deed -- Details of the Crime.

At a late hour Tuesday night there occurred one of the most horrible murders that ever a reporter was called on to chronicle - a deed almost unparalleled in the atrocity of its execution. It happened on the premises of Mr. W. K. Hall, an

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insurance man lately from Galveston, residing at 901 West Pecan, about a block beyond the iron bridge that spans Shoal Creek. A colored woman named Mollie Smith had been in the service of the family as a cook for a little over a month. A young colored fellow named Walter Spencer, has been coming to see her for some months, and the couple, though not married, were lately living in the relation of man and wife. Between 3 and 4 o'clock Wednesday morning Mr. Thos. Chalmers, a brother of Mrs. Hall, was aroused from sleep by the entrance of Spencer. He was bleeding freely from several wounds on the head and said, "Mr. Tom, for God's sake do something to help me; somebody has nearly killed me."

Young Chalmers at once sprang up, and striking a light, saw that the negro was badly hurt. He could tell nothing of the occurrence and did not know who hit him. He and the woman above mentioned had been occupying a small apartment in the rear of the house, just back of the kitchen. He remarked that Mollie was gone. Chalmers told him to go to the doctor's and get his wounds dressed. He couldn't leave the house to go with him, owing to the sickness of one of the inmates. Spencer went away. At breakfast time yesterday morning Mollie was missing, but even then nobody was aware of her terrible fate. It was perhaps, about 9 o'clock a.m. when the servant in employ of a neighbor observed a strange looking object in the backyard of the Hall residence. He at once reported the matter and several hurried to the spot. There lay the woman, stark dead, a ghastly object to behold. A horrible hole on the side of her head told the tale. The reason she had not been discovered earlier was that she lay immediately behind a small outhouse and no one thought of looking for her there. From the outhouse to the room where she slept was about fifty steps, so the unfortunate victim of the brutal attack had been dragged to the spot where her dead body was found. All circumstances go to show that the murder was committed in the room where the two were sleeping.

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Later in the day a Statesman man repaired to the scene of the tragedy. He was at first shown the woman still lying in the yard, but a brief glance at the sickening sight was sufficient. She was a light-colored mulatto, apparently about twenty-five years of age. A distinct trail on the ground leading to her door showed where the inhuman fiend had dragged her. She was nearly nude when first discovered. Inside the room was evidence of a desperate struggle. A broken looking-glass, disarranged furniture, and bloody finger marks on the door showed that a fight for life, silent, and unseen save by the principles, but obstinate to the end, had taken place. The pillows and sheets were bathed in blood, and sanguinary stains were all over the floor. Beside the foot of the bed lay an ax, beyond doubt the instrument of the crime, as it, too, was blood-stained. Who used it? There lies the mystery. Did the man and woman engage in a fight between themselves, and did he slay her? That is one theory. It is only a theory. There is nothing in particular to make it plausible. The kindest relations had previously existed between them. No difficulty had occurred to break off an intimacy that had lasted for months. Why should either want to murder the other? The other theory hinges on the arrest of William Brooks, a young colored man employed as a bar-tender in the barrel house saloon on East Pecan. Brooks was a former lover of Mollie, and had known her in Waco before she came to Austin. This other theory supposes jealousy on his part. He was put in the county jail in the afternoon on suspicion. Late in the afternoon, when called on by a reporter, he made the following statement: "I know both the woman Mollie Smith and Walter Spencer. I liked them both, and never had any falling out with either. I knew her in Waco, and have had nothing to do with her here. I am innocent of the murder, and can prove by any number of witnesses that I was at a ball on Sand Hill (near the Tillotson Institute) till 4 o'clock in the morning, and was the prompter. They have got hold of the wrong man sure."

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Going to the house where Brooks said he went after leaving the ball, in an alley back of Dr. Wright's church the reporter asked of the colored woman living there at what hour Brooks came in, Between 2 and 3 o'clock in the night she answered. Are you certain of that, was asked. Yes sir, I am, because after he had come in and slept a while, I woke up and happened to look at the clock noticed it was just three. It will be remembered that Brooks said it was 4 o'clock when he left the ball, and as the place was fully a mile and a half distant, it would have been at least twenty minutes past four ere he got to his room, had he gone directly home. A number of negroes, however stated that he stayed through the dance, and it maybe the colored woman was mistaken about the hour.

The wounded man was next called on. He was in a pitiable light, but was able to speak, though with a somewhat indistinct utterance. There were five facial hurts -- the most serious one being a puncture under the eye, fracturing the orbital bone. Dr. Bart, the city physician, had found a part of the bone pressed back into the cavity against the eye-ball, and had pulled it forward into place. Though badly hurt, the doctor thinks the chances of recovery are favorable. His statement was made in a clear way as follows:

"It was some time between 9 and 10 o'clock Tuesday night that I went to Mollie's room. She complained of being sick, and asked me if I wasn't sorry for her. She also told me to wake her up early the next morning. I don't remember anything else that happened till I woke and found myself hurt. I don't know who did it, [?] to go to the doctor. I went out the back way and noticed that the gate was wide open, though I recollected having fastened it. I first went to the house of a colored man living near and he gave me a [?]. Then I went to see Dr. Ralph Swearingen, who washed and dressed my wound. I then went back to Mr. Hall's, and, found the front gate open; then I started up town but was so weak that I fell down several times before getting to my brothers restaurant on Brazos street near Newton's saloon. It was

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about six o'clock in the morning when I got there, and he had taken me home in a hack. I have not quarreled with anybody but Brooks. Some three months ago he wanted to fight me. He had stayed with Mollie in Waco. But I don't say that he was the one, I don't know who did it, but anybody could have gone into the room easily through the door connecting it with the kitchen."

These are about the facts, and the reader is left to draw his own conclusions. Whether slain by her lover or some party from the outside is as yet a mystery that envelops as foul a deed as was ever done in Austin.

January 2, 1885.

Austin Daily Statesman.

STILL A MYSTERY. No New Developments in the Pecan Street Horror. A Possible Clue.

In the account given in yesterday's *Statesman* of the late killing on Pecan Street, an incident was omitted that may help to solve the mystery that still surrounds the case. An ax, with blood stains was found next morning near the bed. It was no doubt the instrument of the murder. When Spencer aroused Mr. Chalmers, he told him that he had been hit with an ax. This ax may turn out to be the chief means in finding out the guilty party. There was no ax belonging on the place. Chalmers asserts that the family did not possess an ax. Spencer had borrowed one a short while ago, for some temporary use. Then it follows that whoever used it brought it there for that very purpose. This instrument of the murder may thus afford a clue to the perpetrator of the brutal deed. A colored woman employed on the place as a nurse, Nancy Anderson, who slept in the front part of the house the night of the tragedy said yesterday in conversation with a reporter, that she is satisfied that the foul work was done by a third



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