

SOME MURDERS TAKE LONGER to solve than others. A widely publicized case, titled "Lady of the Lake" by the press of the Olympic Peninsula, started in December 1937. It ended when the murderer disappeared following his parole from the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla in 1951, 14 years later.

This story became of interest to the North Olympic Peninsula law enforcement, medical professionals and the general public when on July 6, 1940, a rope-trussed fully clothed woman's body was found by fishermen floating in Lake Crescent, west of Port Angeles. For the next 18 months Sheriff Charles Kemp, his deputy Carl Kirk and Clallam County Prosecuting Attorney Ralph Smythe attempted to identify the body. An autopsy determined the victim had been strangled before being thrown into the lake.

The remains were deposited on the floor of the garage at the Christman Mortuary in Port Angeles for examination by Dr. Irving E. Kaveney, medical student Harlan McNutt and Wilbert Stikes, the undertaker's assistant. The face was unrecognizable, having been exposed to the water movement and the inhabitants of the lake. The body was wrapped in two blankets. As, piece by piece, the disintegrated cloth was pulled away, there lay, white as marble, the body of a woman of about 35 years with auburn hair. She was fully clothed, except for shoes. What had once been a green wool one-piece dress was mingled in twisted remnants with the debris of the blankets, one gray and one black. All were tied and knotted with hemp rope, from which a few tail-like sections dangled as if a weight had broken away.

Regarding the almost odorless condition of the remains, Dr. Kaveney commented, "I never saw a corpse just like this one before. The flesh is hard, almost waxy. She must be nearly as large as when she went into the water. I'd say she is about 5 feet, 6 inches in height and that she weighed about one hundred-forty pounds when alive."

OBVIOUSLY, THE FLESH WAS not the usual flesh at all. As Sheriff Kemp said: "It's more like a statue. The flesh has turned to some rubber-like substance." Dr. Charles P. Larson, a capable pathologist from Tacoma, stated, "Saponi-

fication," when he viewed the corpse. In other words, the body had turned to soap. Dr. Larson explained, "The lake has strong alkalis which work on the fatty substance of the flesh and, with a purely chemical reaction, turned the body into soap." The water's extremely cold temperature also contributed to the body's preservation. But still—who was this woman? Who killed her? How did the body get into Lake Crescent? For two months the body was kept in the morgue; then it was buried, without a name, in the pauper's section of the Clallam County Cemetery.

As time passed questions arose. Through two exhumations Sheriff Kemp extracted a partial six-tooth dental bridge from the mouth of the corpse. Then, it was thought, identification could be possible. With this as the only tangible clue, Sheriff Kemp sent circulars depicting the bridge to dental societies and journals as well as law enforcement agencies all over the country. The circular asked that the information be passed to dental personnel in their respective areas.

More than six months later, in Faulkton, South Dakota, Dr. Albert J. McDowell came across the picture of the gold bridge work. He had performed that work for a young red-haired woman then known to him as Mrs. Hallie Spraker. He contacted Sheriff Kemp, and the "Lady of the Lake" became Mrs. Hallie Illingworth.

In 1936, Hallie Latham Spraker Strickman had married Monty Illingworth. Although disagreements were frequent, they lived together in Port Angeles until her disappearance in December 1937.

According to later testimony, Illingworth, who had moved to California, said that during their

marriage his wife frequently threatened to leave him. Therefore, when she disappeared, he figured she had done just that.

Authorities worked diligently, having the assistance of Hollis B. Fultz, a special investigator from the State Attorney General's Office. Their efforts conclusively linked Monty Illingworth to the murder. He was found living in Long Beach, California, with his self-described, common-law wife, Eleanor Pearson, also a former Port Angeles resident. Upon request, California Governor Culbert L. Olson signed extra-

Lady  
of the  
Lake

A Macabre  
Tale of Murder  
on the Olympic  
Peninsula

◆

By Harriet U. Fish



*ABOVE: Scenic Lake Crescent, near the top of the Olympic Peninsula, was an important factor in one of the strangest murder investigations in Clallam County history.*



Kellogg Collection, North Olympic Library

*LEFT: Hallie Illingworth (the "Lady of the Lake") and her husband Monty.*

dition papers on November 19, 1941. Sheriff Kemp himself went to retrieve Illingworth for trial, the spectacular features of which overshadowed all other news for several weeks.

A long list of witnesses testified at the Illingworth trial that the couple fought incessantly during their brief marriage and that physical violence occurred often between them. Apparently, Hallie thought her husband paid too much attention to other women. The jurors also heard testimony from Harry Brooks, owner and operator of the La Poel Resort at the west end of Lake Crescent. He stated that in December 1937 Monty Illingworth entered his store to borrow a length of rope. Illingworth told him the half-inch rope was needed

to tow a disabled beer truck. The rope was never returned. Dr. Larson, a Tacoma pathologist, testified that his laboratory tests of the pieces of rope found around the victim's body and the rope still in Brook's possession were exactly the same pure hemp fiber, strand count, twist and size.

**ILLINGWORTH'S DEFENSE ATTORNEY** Joseph H. Johnston was unable to counteract the skillful presentation made by prosecutor Max Church, who showed that all the clues found on the soap-like body pointed accusingly to Illingworth as the killer. In addition, the detailed investigatory activity and timing work done by Mr. Fultz bolstered the verdict of second-degree murder. Monty Illingworth was convicted on March 5, 1942, by visiting Judge H. G. Sutton from Kitsap County and sentenced on March 20 to life imprisonment at Walla Walla State Penitentiary. With good behavior, however, Illingworth was paroled on January 10, 1951. Soon after his release he disappeared, never to be seen again.

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**COVER:** While stationed in the Northwest during the 1840s British Lieutenant Henry Warre painted scenes of Hudson's Bay Company posts and settled communities throughout the Northwest. His depiction of the source of the Columbia River shows the spot near which David Thompson established the first fur post on the Upper Columbia in 1807. Along with Lieutenant Mervyn Vavasour, Warre surveyed conditions in the Oregon Country and wrote a report for the Secretary of Colonies just prior to the completion of the Oregon Treaty in 1846. (Washington State Historical Society)