

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

COLD AND DASTARDLY MURDER: Part 2 of 4

Here is the second part of a four part series of historical articles to retell the tale of the murder of Mrs. Františka Fajmon, which happened in Hale Township, McLeod County, Minnesota, one-hundred years ago.

STILL SHROUDED IN DEEPEST MYSTERY

Hutchinson Leader, December 16, 1910

Slayer of Poor Old Mrs. Fajmon Still at Large—Officers and Detective Follow Many Fruitless Clues

Not one but nearer one hundred times every day is the LEADER asked by phone message or office caller—“Any news of the murder yet?” And regretfully the answer is returned, “Not a word; the officers are foiled at every turn”

Every day since the night of the awful tragedy in the little home in Hale township Sheriff Frank Kalsu and County Attorney Sam Anderson, assisted by one of the ablest and most successful detectives the famous Pinkerton Agency has on their force, have bent their minds and energies in an unwearied but disappointing search for the murderer. They have had at least half a dozen suspects under surveillance but most if not all of them have been able to prove an alibi or in other ways free themselves from suspicion of complicity in the awful crime. It is believed, however, that there are one or two parties running to whose doors are being found faint but still pretty clearly defined foot prints of the criminal but the officers are very reticent and will talk of anything but their work in this mysterious and baffling case. They are leaving no stone unturned, they are sparing themselves in no way in their efforts to run the murderer to each and one of them declared with emphasis yesterday that they will never abandon the search until he is captured and convicted.

Everyone has his theory of the murder but here is the one pretty generally accepted as most plausible: It was not a person known to Fajmon and wife who committed the murder, but quite probably he was a confederate imported to do the deed by someone knowing them well and knowing they had money stowed away in their home. Had he been known to them he would have had at least taken the precaution to draw a handkerchief over his face to prevent recognition.

None of the persons who have been under suspicion are so inured to bloodshed that they would have gone to the house deliberately planning to rob and then kill to cover their tracks when by a disguise they could have escaped undetected with no ghosts of the wantonly buttered old folks to people their dreams and the hangman’s noose suspended over them.

That it was an outsider who did the deed there is this suggestion: At ten o’clock the night of the murder Henry Wolter, brother of Mrs. Diedrick Knacke, living a couple of miles south of Hutchinson, was returning home via the railroad track from a visit to a neighbor. When two miles north of Biscay he met a man coming south walking very rapidly. He spoke not a word and hastened by so fast that in the darkness he could form no impression of his appearance.

Most people meeting under such circumstances will at least offer a friendly “hullo” or “good evening,” but this individual sprinted by in silence. Was he the murderer, walking across country to Glencoe where he would climb onto a freight train and escape from the region which would surely be searched next day for suspicious characters? The theory seems plausible.

The night of the crime Mr. Anderson phoned or wired to every town within a radius of 100 miles to look out for suspicious characters. A response came from Buffalo Lake but the party suspected had a good alibi. County Attorney Pratt of Anoka county wrote Sheriff Klaus that a man answering the description had been seen on the road near Anoka. The sheriff wired, “Capture and hold him.” He was found in a shack with an abandoned ngress and—proved to be a Scandinavian.

The funeral of the good old wife and mother whose life was thus cruelly and brutally cut short was held from the little farm home she loved so well last Friday afternoon at one o’clock. The husband, dazed and mute under the burden of his bereavement, the daughters convulsed with grief and a vast concourse of neighbors many, both men and women, sobbing in their sympathy, gathered around the casket as it was placed in the yard.



Scene from the Františka Fajmon funeral, Hale Township, McLeod County, Minnesota.



Gravesite of Františka Fajmon, Bohemian National Cemetery, Silver Lake, Minnesota.

Rev. J. Krenek, pastor of the Silver Lake Presbyterian church, delivered in Bohemian a powerful and pathetic discourse, depicting in burning and thrilling words the horror of the crime and calling on the murderer, if he were there present, to stand forth and then and there gaze upon the form of the beloved and harmless woman, a wife and mother, and let her face, pale and silent in the ruin he had wrought drive his craven soul to implore mercy from on high."

MURDERER A MERE BOY--JOSEPH HERZAN KILLED MRS. FAJMON

Hutchinson Leader, January 6, 1911

Long Hunt Ended Friday. Dogged Persistence of Officials and Detectives Never Surpassed In History of Man Hunts. Life at Hard Labor in State Prison will be Fate of Offender

“Josef Herzan, a mere boy in intellect and scarcely more than a boy in years, who wanted plenty of spending money and didn’t want to work for it, was the one who pressed a revolver to the temple of Mrs. Joseph Fajmon on the night of December 4, fired a 32 calibre bullet into her brain and ran away, leaving her lying on the floor of her little home weltering in her life-blood.

Then, to all appearances, the murderer dropped from sight as completely as though the earth had yawned and swallowed him. But he had done nothing of the kind. He moved on in the even tenor of his way, meeting and greeting his friends, seeking ease and pleasure, and living within the very shadow of his deed as unconcerned and happy-go-lucky as though his soul had never been seared by as black and sickening a crime as stained the hand of Cain.

One day last week a reporter of the LEADER was discussing with County Attorney Sam G. Anderson the crime and the long and futile hunt of himself and Sheriff Klaus and the Pinkerton detective for the criminal. He confessed that the prospects for the results were discouraging. They had literally combed the country for miles around the scene of the crime and—cruel though it was—had caught in their drag-net many innocent persons and compelled them, as they invariably succeeded in doing, to show their skirts clear of all suspicion of complicity by accounting to a minute for their time and proving their whereabouts the night of the murder. Painful as it was to the pursuers to thus be compelled to shame and confuse the innocent it must be done, and their work had thus far come to naught.

The attorney admitted that he and his co-workers were discouraged and then straightened up and snapped out, “But that’s nothing. It don’t stop us for a minute. And you can put it in your note book that this hunt won’t end until we have our man behind the bars. He’s on earth and we’re going to get him. “ Young Herzan spent several days last week in Hutchinson, stopping with his grandmother, Mrs. Anna Kriklava, a widow living in a tiny cottage east of the German Baptist church. She sold her place east of Frank Dennis’ farm three years ago and bought the little home in town.

The lad hung around the stores and billiard balls while here, playing pool considerably and spending money freely, in fact his supply of money was one of the things that first directed suspicion towards him. The money was the few dollars surrendered up by his victim before she surrendered her life. Practically every young fellow in the locality of loose habits and a tendency to dissipate had been under the scrutiny of the authorities but Herzan. His boyish and inoffensive disposition had shielded him from their gaze, but the moment they struck the right trail they found it fairly studded with signboards directing them to Herzan as the criminal. Asked if he or his brother had a revolver he replied, “No,” and when questioned sharply by Mr. Anderson turned white and shakily declared in Bohemian to John Huderle, who has rendered the authorities valuable assistance, “I am afraid,” refusing then to say anything more. His next younger brother declared that they had a revolver and took the searchers to the Herzan home on the Fiman place, half a mile north of Silver Lake station, and produced from Joe’s room a 32 calibre revolver—the same caliber as the bullet cut from Mrs. Fajmon’s brain—and shells. The store

in Silver Lake where the shells were bought was found. His whereabouts that night were then traced as precisely as though his footprints had been stamped in fresh cement.”



Herzan revolver and slug retrieved from the Fajmon murder scene, on display at the McLeod County Heritage Center Museum, Hutchinson, Minnesota

If you have any contributions or suggestions for topics for future columns, please contact me by email: tkadlec@gmail.com or call me: (651) 271-0422 or send your letters to my attention: 1408 Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105. See this article online at: www.kadlecovi.com Děkuji! Tony Kadlec