

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

COLD AND DASTARDLY MURDER: Part 3 of 4

Here is the third 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.

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

Hutchinson Leader, January 6, 1911

“The story complete of this remarkable homicide, committed by a boy unschooled in crime, is best told by himself. Here is his confession as made voluntarily and as it appears in his own handwriting with only a few slight corrections in spelling to make it intelligible to the reader:

“I left my home nine o'clock in morning Sunday, Dec.4, 1910. Then I was going to Humlicheck's from Silver Lake. Then I was going to Chapp's. I was there about 15 minutes, then go to Fimon's. I passed around Dostal's and Svihel's on my way to Fimon's and met kids on the road by Svihel's. When I passed the kids I heard the six o'clock bell at Silver Lake. I left the road by Memel and crossed the plowed field to a meadow.



Historical photo of the Josef and Františka Fajmon home, taken on the day of Františka's funeral.

I got through a wire fence and came up to Fimon's house from the north-east. I came to door and rapped on door. Door was opened and I walked in the house, pulled out revolver, pointed it at Fimon and his wife and said "money or life." She said they hadn't got any money. He said he will give me all money what is in his pocket. He took it out and handed to me. He said he got no more. I didn't take the money! I wanted more money, I said to Fimon. She took the lantern and went to celler. Came ought again. She bring money, put on table, 2 dollars in paper. Rest were silver, 7 or 8 dollars in all. I take the money and put it in my pocket. I turned around and he was gone. I asked he where is Fimon. She said he is up stairs. I said, "Fimon come down." I said it two or three times. Fimon answered something and I didn't understand him. She said we got all wheat yet. She got lantern. "I will show you wheat in granary" she said. Then she said, "I know you." Then I opened the door with my left hand and revolver in right hand and shot up as I was going out. I run across a plowed field to the road. I looked back to the house when I was running. I ran southeast from the house across fields to road. I went to Silver Lake. I was going around south end of Swan Lake and I met a team on the road at Navratil's. It was with a buggy. It was on a hill east of Navratil's. I went on main road to Silver Lake. When I was going through town I met Gus Polifka at Krece scale. He asked me where I was. I told him that I was over to Humlichek's. I didn't meet anybody else.

I was going by the lumber yard to the lake where I see children skating on lake. Had a fire on ice. I did not know anybody. I crossed the lake. I was going to Travnicek's store. I crossed the lake and came on the road at the timber on the east side of the road. I kept the road to Travnicek's store. When I got there my brother Charley was there, Jim Schultz, Ed. And Gus Travnicek. Nobody else was there. When I was going from Fimon's house I didn't meet anybody except a team at Navratil's and Gus Polifka at Silver Lake. I didn't meet anybody else till I got to Travnicek's. The revolver that I used that night was a nickel plate, black handle, 32 short, center fire marked and number 6127. This revolver is with the sheriff. I bought a box of 32 short shells to this revolver last fall from Slanga at his hardware at Silver Lake. That revolver belongs to my brother, Charley. I took the revolver in the morning when I left home to go to Humlichek's. I took all the shells with me. After I left Chapp on way to Fimon's I loaded revolver from these shells. I put in five shells in gun all that will hold. I shot one of these shells at Mrs. Fimon. That is the only shells I shot. I took all the shells out of the revolver and threw them away in Korista's woods on side of road south of Silver Lake, when I was going from Fimon's to Travnicek's. The same time I throw away shells from revolver I throw away all shells in the box and the box too. What I have written here I first told to Mr. Picha in the jail yesterday in front of two other men in jail. I told it to Mr. Picha in Bohemian. Mr. Picha then took me to sheriff's office. I told the same story to the sheriff in American.

What I have written down here I true, all of it. Nobody has promised me anything. No threats were made to me by anybody. I want to tell it myself.
January 2, 1911."

This statement was verified in the presence of Frank Klaus, F.X. Kohler, Joseph C. Fielding, Dr. Thomas W. Hovorka, F.D. Stocking, Frank Kadlec and Sam G. Anderson, Jr.

Young Herzan was arrested at his home late Friday afternoon by Deputy Sheriff F.X. Kohler and taken to Glencoe and lodged in jail. There were also present at the time Wm. Phillips and Chas. Senescall, auto drivers, and John Huderle. Preliminary to this old Mr. Fajmon, who is now making his home at John Friauf's, was taken to the house in which the murder was committed and secreted up stairs. The suspect

was taken there and the two were suddenly brought face to face and, standing with his feet almost upon the spot on the floor stained with the blood of his victim, the boy was charged with the crime. His captors were momentarily disappointed, for he never flinched, but his meaningless answer indicated his state of mind. His only response was, "it's up to you." Mr. Fajmon identified him by his voice, size and clothes, saying, "Yes, this is the one who killed my poor wife." It may be stated here that young Herzan learned from Frank Dvorak, who worked for the Fajmons last summer, that they kept several hundred dollars secreted in their home. They were working together with a threshing crew at the time. Young Herzan is a son of Chas. Herzan, who has lived on rented farms in the vicinity of Silver Lake for about 25 years. There are eight children in the family, ranging in ages from a girl four years old to a married daughter, Mrs. John Humlicheck.

The exact age of this boy who has brought shame unspeakable upon his family is 20 years, six months. The family are of the Catholic faith in religion and Joseph is a member of the Bohemian church in Silver Lake. Of late years, however, he has become very careless of his spiritual obligations, has rarely gone to confession and has rarely been seen at church. Strange to say, however, he did go to church on Christmas day but if he experience any inward revulsion of feeling over the black crime resting on his soul there was no outward sign of it.

He began going to school when seven in Dist. No. 11—the Louzer district—and quit when 15 years old. Among his teachers were Mary Hudec, Emma Kadlec, Elva Powell (now Mrs. Paul Chernausek), and Albena Monroe. One of his schoolmates describes him as dishonest and continually given to stealing articles from the desks of companions.

Mother love—ever true and long suffering—is his greatest solace in the disaster he has brought upon himself. Mrs. Herzan is heartbroken over her son's deed and seeks in every way to console him, but the father steels his heart against the boy and does not wish to see him.

The mother defends her child with the assertion that he has in many ways never been of normal mind. He always seemed, she declares, utterly without sentiment as to the sacredness of human life. Working in the woods with the other boys he would see them exposed to danger from falling trees without giving them a sign of warning and in playing with the other children he would have spells when he seemed to revel in being positively cruel.

If these things can be established as facts, taken in connection with the matter-of-fact way in which a boy reared among peaceful people in a civilized community with no experience to harden him in crime, committed a murder which would have made the goriest butchered hesitate, will classify him as a pervert and may legally and logically be urged as extenuating facts in a plea for a mitigation of his sentence.

He was arraigned before Justice W.C. Russel of Glencoe last Tuesday and the date for his hearing on the charge against him was set for next Wednesday, Dec. 11. He will then be committed to the county jail to await the assembling of a grand jury, when he may be indicted for murder in the first degree, the penalty for which under the statutes of Minnesota must be hanging unless the court can find mitigating circumstances.

County Attorney Anderson hopes to have a special grand jury summoned for the special term which Judge Morrison holds January 24 to hear court cases. If the court orders, this special grand jury young Herzan will probably start in on a life sentence in the state penitentiary. He has employed Attorney F. R. Allen of Glencoe to plead for him before the court and as the prosecuting county attorney does not favor the death penalty, the announcement above that a life sentence will be meted out may be accepted as correct.”

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