

# MYSTERY IN THIS CASE

The Syracuse Standard, Syracuse, NY, Saturday, August 14, 1897

MRS. HAYES DIES SUDDENLY AND A TRUNK IS RIFLED

FOUR PEOPLE ARRESTED

NOT MUCH CHANCE OF MURDER, BUT \$750 WILL HAVE TO BE ACCOUNTED FOR.

James Hayes, proprietor of the Delevan house in West Fayette street, two women who were inmates of the place and have the reputation of being public prostitutes and a woman said to have been Hayes's mistress, are in the police cells awaiting arraignment this morning, when they will be called upon to tell what they knew of the death of Mrs. Nellie Hayes Thursday night and the disappearance of \$750 in money supposed to have been in a trunk in the room where she died. There are some very mysterious circumstances surrounding the case, and while murder can probably never be proved against any of the suspected persons, the fact whether or not Mrs. Hayes had money in her trunk and where it went will be settled.

Mrs. Hayes had been an invalid for three or four months, suffering from appendicitis and a complication of other diseases of a character which made death only a question of a short time. A friend of Hayes's told a Standard reporter last night that Hayes took his wife to Three Rivers a week ago yesterday and told her to stay there until she got well. On Saturday following Hayes received a telegram from his wife saying that she was worse. Hayes went to Three Rivers, and finding that Mrs. Hayes could not be prevailed upon to stay there, removed her to her home.

Thursday night Mrs. Hayes was taken violently ill. Hayes was drunk, beastly drunk. He admits that and says that he had been drunk since Tuesday. He was trying to drown his sorrow, he says. He has a police record and has been arrested for burglary, but his friends say he was faithful to his wife, whom he loved devotedly, and was heartbroken to see her gradually fade away. She had been a hard worker and previous to her sickness had done most of the housework in the hotel without the aid of a servant.

The two women inmates of the house who have been arrested were in the hotel when Mrs. Hayes was taken ill. They went to her room and locked the door. Hayes could hear groans within and demanded admittance. The women refused to open the door. Whether they were afraid of Hayes's violence in his drunken condition, or whether they were carrying out the details of a crime is unknown. They kept the door shut and there is where they made a mistake. No suspicion could have been attached to them if they had allowed Hayes to enter. Hayes finally got mad and began to batter down the door. He threw his body against it repeatedly and at last the hinges gave way.

Hayes drove the two women out into the street and they took refuge in the Mansion house annex. An officer who heard the disturbance went to the hotel. Hayes's wife was dying and she breathed

her last a few minutes afterward. Hayes accused the two women of taking \$750 in money out a trunk which stood by the side of his wife's bed. The women were arrested, together with another inmate of the house. *Sarah Wakefield*, who had officiated as nurse for Mrs. Hayes, and incidentally, it is said by Acting Inspector O'Brien as mistress to Hayes. The other women gave their names to the police as Lena Parker and Clara Willis of Oswego.

The police do not think the two women who were in the room with Mrs. Hayes when she died have anything to do with the disappearance of the money, if it was in the trunk. Hayes was so drunk that night that he might have taken the money from the trunk himself and never remembered it, or he may have been misrepresenting the facts when he said the money was there. The police have a theory that Hayes and Mrs. Wakefield know where the money is, but why Hayes should charge the other women with stealing it if he had it himself does not jibe with this line of argument, for the money belonged to Hayes and it is claimed that he kept it in the trunk himself, in charge of his wife, and had a perfect right to take it if he wanted it.

The theory gained currency that the Hayes woman had been poisoned and Coroner Weaver was notified. He made a careful investigation, but could find nothing to prove death was other than from natural causes. Dr. J. C. Stout, who had attended the woman, gave the history of her case. He said he left the house Thursday night, knowing that the woman could not live until morning. She was suffering from peritonitis and appendicitis. He made her as comfortable as he could and went away. Coroner Weaver says that an autopsy to determine whether the woman's death was due to poison will be impossible, as the body was embalmed before the case was reported to him; hence a chemical examination of the stomach will be useless, as the embalming fluid contains arsenic.

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## NOTES:

Mrs. Sarah Wakefield was a widow and the sister of Horace and James Hallock. The Hallock brothers were the builders and owners of the Iron Pier on the northeast corner of Onondaga Lake, at the end of North Salina Street. Sarah was living on East Railroad Street [Washington Street] after recently losing a protracted court battle, with her brother Horace and his wife Hattie, over the ownership of a house on Shonnard Street [1897-06-03]. A Wakefield relative had left her a life interest in the property and she had Horace build a house for her on the property. When Horace learned that she only had a life interest in the property a long court battle ensued while Horace tried to get a mortgage on the house that he had just built.

During those proceedings Sarah had stated that she had a part interest in James Hayes' Delevan House. Sarah was acting as a nurse to Hayes ailing wife at the time of her death but her ownership status in the Delevan House demonstrates the existence of a more extended relationship with Hayes than just the recent illness of Mrs. Hayes.

[1897-06-03] – "The Hallocks Won," The Daily Journal, Syracuse, NY, Thursday, June 3, 1897.

This article, and another on the same topic, both described a rumor to the effect that Sarah Wakefield was Hayes' mistress. However, Hayes was only 25 years old and Sarah was a 49-year old widow, only 6 years younger than his mother.