

Henry Sheldon Museum Provides Archival Material To Filmmakers Examining 1935 Unsolved Murders

News Release — Sheldon Museum
Sept. 22, 2016

Middlebury... The Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History in Middlebury is assisting in current attempts to examine the murder of three individuals whose remains were found on May 15, 1935, in a remote location off Burnham Drive in East Middlebury, Vermont, on land that is now part of the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) snowmobile trail. Over the past few years, law enforcement officials have reviewed archival material at the Sheldon, but most recently the Sheldon was visited by New York City-based documentary filmmaker and producer Nilita Vachani and her crew working on the film “Reborn in Clay.” The 1935 unsolved murders are examined in the film.

The crew consists of forensic artist Anne Bielby who worked on facial reconstructions of two of the 1935 murder victims, as well as photographer Eythan Maidhof, cameraman Chris Boylston, and sound recordist Braulio Lin, who will soon be producing a film. Sheldon Archivist Eva Garcelon-Hart spent the day with the team introducing them to the documentary material at the Sheldon’s archives dealing with the triple murders, including diaries and period newspapers.

The unidentified decedents — a woman and two young boys believed to be her sons — had all been shot in the head, their corpses unceremoniously dumped in a ditch. Previous news accounts recorded the discovery of the corpses:

A woman named Grace Dague and her daughter, Inez Perry Masterson, were looking for flowers in the forest when they stumbled upon the skeletal remains of the three murder victims on May 15, 1935. During a 1985 interview with the Addison Independent, Masterson recalled spotting something in a ditch near the side of an old logging road.

“It looked like a white rock,” she reported. “So I just kicked it and it turned out to be a skull with a bullet hole right between the eyes,” The mother and daughter rushed home to call the sheriff’s office (Vermont State Police would not be formed until 1947).

Sheriff Ralph Sweet and other authorities found three skeletons, each with a .38-caliber Colt automatic bullet hole in the skull. The bodies had been wrapped together in a blanket and a green canvas awning with pulleys still attached, according to follow-up reporting in the Addison Independent. Investigators believed the bodies had been there for two or three years.

The victims' bones were stored in boxes at the state medical examiner's office in hopes they would be of future help. However, the DNA is so degraded that it is of little use. Recently, a forensic sculpture class at the New York Academy of Art — with assistance from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children — completed facial reconstructions of the victims, using the remains as their guide.

In May 2015, once the facial reconstructions were complete, the remains were interred during a solemn ceremony at the Prospect Cemetery in East Middlebury, which was attended by Sheldon Museum Archivist Eva Garcelon-Hart and Associate Director Mary Manley.

Documentary filmmaker Nilita Vachani and her team, in addition to reviewing the historical records at the Henry Sheldon Museum, have visited and conducted research at the Vermont State Archives and the Vermont Medical Examiner's Office. They hope to have their film completed and available for viewing in 2017.

The archives of the Henry Sheldon Museum provide the most in-depth collections on the history of Middlebury and Addison County and are used frequently by researchers, genealogists, authors, and film makers seeking reliable, accessible information for their projects.