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Clinton

MAGAZINE

TRUE CRIME





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MAGAZINE | FALL 2025

TRUE CRIME IN CLINTON COUNTY



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Who killed Pamela?

Murder at Clinton club remains unsolved after 44 years

BY JENNA BLOUNT
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Investigators from the Division of Criminal Investigations and Clinton Police Department began a search of the Amvets club after sealing off the site, Jan. 13, 1981 (Herald file photo)

Pamela Hinrichs wasn't supposed to bartend at the AMVETS Club that night, but she'd been called in to pick up the shift. That morning, Jan. 12, 1981, the 19-year-old had gone to her sister's house, so Bobbette could cut her bangs for her.

"She was a nut, and even leaving, you watch her go to the car, and she'd always have to do something stupid to make you laugh," Bobbette said. "That's my last memory of her is walking out the door like that."

Pamela had also gone to her sister Candy's house, borrowing one of her brother-in-law's sweaters to wear to work. Before Pamela left, Candy wrote her a check for \$5 she put into her pocket to cash later at the club.

Monday night there was "cigarette night," when Pamela's dad — a former AMVETS commander — would bring about 100 cartons of cigarettes from Wisconsin.

"That's why I think they knew to rob it on a Monday," Pamela's brother Ray said.

Pamela was the youngest of Raymond and Jean's kids. She and her dad were best friends.

"She played guitar with my dad," Bobbette said, laughing: "She couldn't sing for —, but she could play the guitar."

Pamela had graduated from Clinton High School in 1979 and, over Christmas of 1980 had gotten engaged to her boyfriend.

She'd been working at the club for about the past year. Just recently, she'd been promoted to assistant manager.

That Monday night was slow, with only about 10 customers at the bar, all of whom were AMVETS members.

"Pam was in her usual nice, won-

derful mood that night," Richard Hudson said the following day, The Herald reported. "She loved to kid you."

Richard would usually forget his gloves and leave them behind at the bar. He remembered to take them with him on this night when Pamela walked him and his wife Carol out when it came time for the club to close at 9 p.m.

"What bothered me about it was thinking what if I had left them there that night and returned to get them," Richard said 10 years later. "It's scary to me to think I might have confronted the murderer, and he may have killed me."

While outside, Pamela started her Cutlass to let it warm up.

As Richard drove out of the parking lot, Carol saw Pamela rush back inside the club where closing entailed just emptying the ashtrays and



Pamela Hinrichs (iowacoldcases.org)



Jean and Raymond Hinrichs, Pamela's parents, are pictured here in the 1980s. (Courtesy photo)

LESLIE ELECTRIC

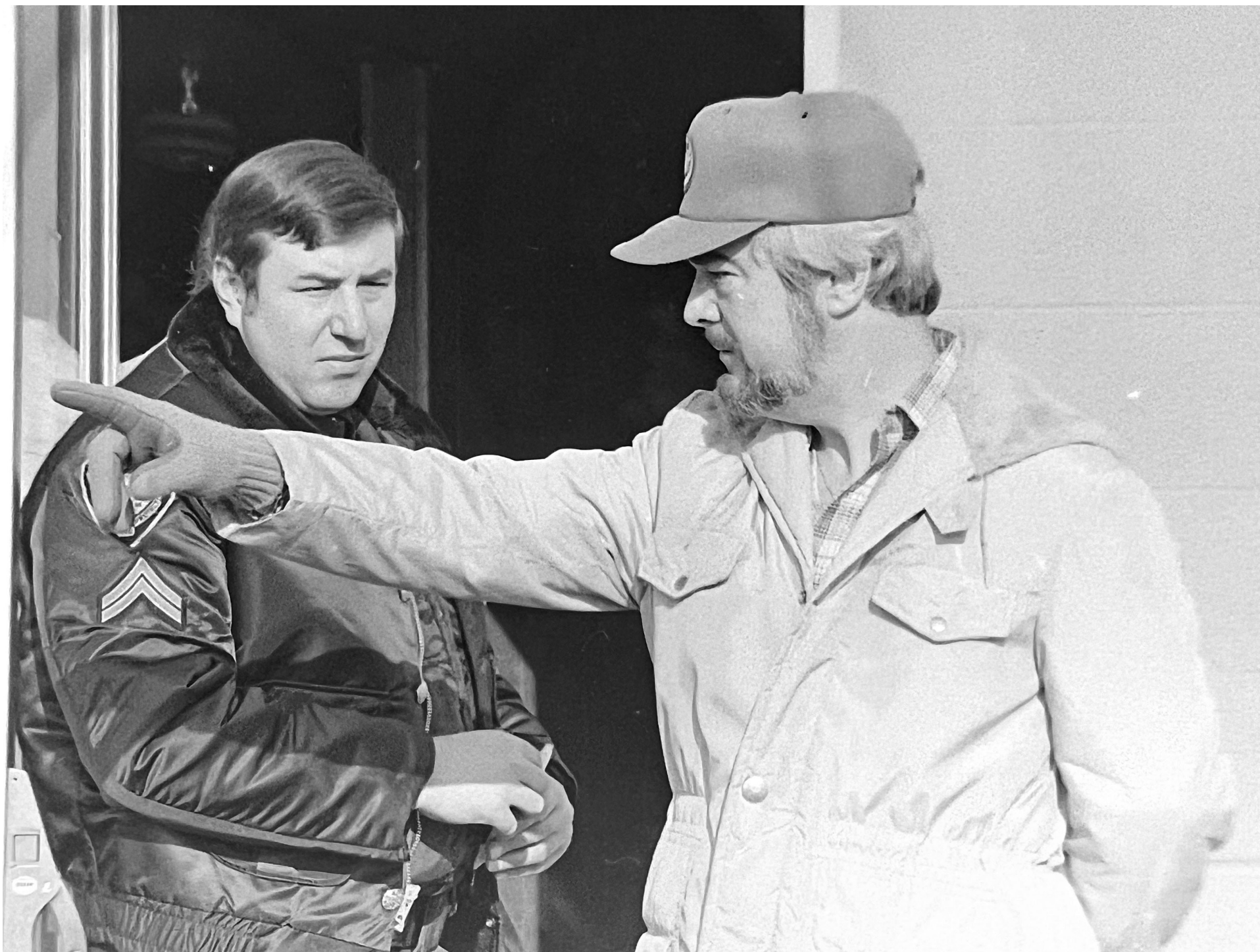
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Richard Hudson speaks with a Clinton police officer on the morning of Jan. 13, 1981 (Herald file photo)

counting the cash. The door automatically locked behind her.

“They were in there waiting,” Ray said.

When Pamela’s car was still sitting outside the club running at 1 a.m., a neighbor who lived across the street called the police. Officers knocked on the door and tried calling the club,

but neither effort was answered. Not finding anything concerning about the scene, they left.

The police were called again at about 5:30 a.m. Pamela’s car was still running outside the club.

“If I had the ability to see through the doors and around corners, we would have followed up,” then-Officer Steve

Mallinger said. “But an idling car isn’t an unusual thing.”

At 8 a.m. on Jan. 13, 1981, AMVETS Auxiliary member Helen Simon came to the club to prepare for a bingo game there that night.

She noticed Pamela’s car parked beside the building—no longer idling—and that the outside lights of the club

were still on.

Simon went inside and to the kitchen upstairs. After about 10 minutes, she went downstairs to get ice from the bar.

“I knew something was wrong, though, when I saw the lights on and things strewn about, because Pam was so neat and efficient,” Simon said. “She wouldn’t have left the lights on, and

she always cleaned everything up, before she left.”

Simon walked to the end of the bar and saw Pamela’s body. She was lying face down and with one arm up around her head. The bar cash register and safe sat open and cleaned out of about \$1,500, but the \$5 check Candy had written for Pamela to cash was later found to still be in her pocket.

Simon, immediately, ran out of the club to her nearby home to call the police and club manager.

Pamela’s parents were at home, with Ray sleeping on the couch, when they heard the call of a possible homicide at the AMVETS Club go out to police over the scanner.

Seeing that Pamela’s car wasn’t parked outside, “Mom started screaming,” Ray said.

Raymond drove, speeding through stop signs, from their house to the club on South 17th Street.

“There was probably 12 cops, because I got out of the car, and I ran at the door first, trying to get in. They weren’t going to let me in. I ran to the other door, and they weren’t going to let me,” Ray said. “I kept turning around and seeing Mom passed out in the car and Dad laying on the ground in snow. Because he kept blaming himself, because he left a quarter to nine.”

THE INVESTIGATION

Clinton County Medical Examiner Dr. Salvador Borja pronounced Pamela dead that morning, confirming that she had died of a gunshot wound to the head. He said the bullets were apparently fired from a handgun, but no weapon or ammunition casings were found at the scene.

Authorities said there were no signs of a struggle, and Pamela had fallen to the floor where she stood when shot.

“They shot her not only in the chest but the back, and then they say the ‘kill shot’ behind the ear to make sure she was dead,” Bobbette said. “They didn’t have to kill her. She was scared to death of guns. In fact, her first boyfriend died

of a gunshot hunting with his father.”

Clinton Police contacted the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigations to assist in the investigation.

“They screwed it up from ‘day one,’” Bobbette said. “They walked through her blood and everything.”

Pamela’s oldest brother — then-chief of police in Randolph, Nebraska — also went immediately to the scene.

Bobbette remembered him shaking his head: “He just said, ‘If they find out who did this, it’s going to be something.’”

In 1981, no one had cell phones and there weren’t security cameras at the club. It would be another five years before DNA evidence would begin to be used in police investigations.

Jim Connell, who had been the first officer to respond when police were called at 1 a.m., said Oct. 2 that he believed Pamela’s killer had handled a gun before.

“I always look for someone who has something to gain,” he said. “And then he may have left town after it, so that’s just my feeling.”

SEVERAL UNSOLVED MURDERS

Just over a week before Pamela was murdered, on Jan. 3, 1981, The Herald reported authorities had gone to a Delmar home to inform a woman of the apparent suicide of her husband, Gene Gilbert, in Yale, South Dakota. Officers found the woman and her five children dead from gunshot wounds. County Attorney Wylie Pillers said authorities had no reason to think the murders were committed by someone other than Gilbert.

Investigations continued into seven other deaths in the area since 1972 that had been labeled as murders.

“There was quite a bit going on at the time within a relatively short time,” local historian John Rowland said. “There was a lot of apprehension in the community about several of those murders being unresolved and few details available.”



Pictured at center is Pamela Hinrichs at Oddies Tavern on 4th Street. They use to have fish fries on Friday and Saturday nights.



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Pamela's mother managed three different Clinton bars—one being the Inn Tavern on South 14th Street, less than a mile from the AMVETS Club, where on Nov. 28, 1981, 53-year-old George Leonard was shot and killed behind the bar, during a robbery in the early morning hours.

Shortly after he was killed, a woman came into the establishment to drop off catalogs and was confronted by the suspect. The suspect beat the woman and fled, leaving her for dead, but she survived.

According to a Cedar Rapids Gazette article published Dec. 1, 1981, despite similarities, Pillars said there was no information that would connect Pamela and Leonard's murders.

Steve Mallinger, a Clinton officer, said 10 years after Pamela's death that he was irritated by the negative press that followed.

"I got fed up with the editorials," he said. "It became a real media event. All they were doing was speculating, and the only people who really knew anything were the people involved."

Police began following Pamela's family members and tapped their phones.

"They said whoever killed her knew her and more than likely knows the family," Bobbette said. "because they made sure she was dead."

Pamela's parents didn't want her to be shown at the funeral that preceded her burial at Clinton Lawn Cemetery but conceded to an open casket, so police could watch her viewers' expressions.

Pamela's brother Ray was among the first to be questioned by law enforcement.

"About two hours after we showed up down there [at the AMVETS Club], we had to go up to the hospital and claim the body," Ray said. "As I was there, one of the detectives was talking to me and Dad. Mom was — She was a wreck. She was no good for anything at that time. And he just asked if I ever pulled a gun on her."



Helen Simon (left) is comforted by her daughter Linda Dodd after Simon discovered Pam Hinrich's body at the Amvets club on the morning of Jan. 13, 1981 (Herald file photo)

Pamela was Ray's older sister by only a year, but would pin him down and give him "Charley horses," picking on him in ways typical of siblings.

"She would have taken the gun away from me and beat me," Ray said.

Ray submitted to a polygraph test and passed, as did George Cheramy, a classmate of Pamela's who lived just down the street from the club, Ray said.

Ray was later contacted by a woman in Missouri who claimed her brother had committed the murder.

"He drove truck for Pepsi," Bobbette explained. "A lot of people said it was the manager of the AMVETS."

The manager, Paul Jefferies, has died since the murder. The club, itself, was

rebuilt after \$150,000 in damage resulted from a fire in 1992.

AFTERMATH

"I was a bitter person," Ray said. "And then my mom took that out of me about—It was '89 when it happened. She gave me a hug and said, 'release it.'"

Pamela's mother died in 1993. Her father then passed in 1995, and Candy in 2016.

Pamela's sister Tammy, who was 21 years old at the time of Pamela's death, said she still holds animosity.

"Because what did you need that bad with that money," she said. "Why? Why her?"

In recent years, Pamela's siblings have continued to bring possible leads to law enforcement.

"We don't get anywhere," Bobbette said.

"The case is still considered open and is reviewed periodically by our department," Clinton Police's Criminal Investigations Division Commander Brett Schwandt stated in a July 14 email. "We follow up with every lead we get."

In the State of Iowa, there is no statute of limitations for murder. Regardless of how long ago it occurred, a suspect can be prosecuted at any time.

"I just hope," Ray said of Pamela's killer, "they find — either find God or find love."

UNSOLVED CLINTON COUNTY HOMICIDES

Iowa Cold Cases, Inc. a nonprofit organization that tracks unsolved murders and suspicious missing persons cases publishes a searchable list at iowacoldcases.org. These are unsolved homicides it lists in Clinton County. The website also has a link to send tips to the Iowa Department of Justice Cold Case unit.

1890: JOHN BERNARD “HENRY” NURRE

On Tuesday, March 11, 1890, Henry Nurre, 76, and his wife were attacked in their rural Clinton County home near Brown’s Station. Mr. Nurre, who suffered a large gash to the back of his head, died that same day. Mrs. Nurre, who was beaten in the head with a hammer and suffered a fractured skull, lived a while longer but was never able to provide any details about the killer or killers.

1972: EDWIN H. JACOBS

Edwin Jacobs, 55, was found in a wooded area known as “Ike’s Peak” in Clinton on Jan. 2, 1972. He was shot to death with a .22 caliber weapon.

1974: LOUIS DALE REED, SR.

On Feb. 14, 1974, Louis Dale Reed, Sr., 53, was killed by a shotgun blast to the chest inside a building at the salvage yard he operated on Clinton’s south side.

1974: EWALD EMIL “ED” BANDIXEN

On Oct. 28, 1974, Ewald Bandixen, 70, was shot in the head at the Folletts service station he’d owned and operated for 43 years.

1974: JUDITH I. REED

On Dec. 27, 1974, Judith Reed, 38, died in her sleep at a friend’s home in Charlotte, Iowa. Her death was attributed to a head injury received during an altercation the night before at the Welcome Inn tavern in Gooselake.

1981: GEORGE LEONARD

George Leonard, 53, was shot while bartending at the Inn Tavern in Clinton on the morning of November 28, 1981.

1982: ROBERT M. CLARY

On Sept. 29, 1982, Robert Clary, 48, was found dead on the floor of his mobile home with a gunshot wound to the chest.

2005: JOSH YODER

Josh Yoder, 4, was killed on May 3, 2005, when a hit-and-run driver struck the boy in the 500 block of South 9th Street in Clinton.



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100TH ANNIVERSARY: The Shootout at the Rural Home Corners

BY CASSANDRA MILLER

Vice President of the Central Community Historical Society in DeWitt

On June 8th, 1925, two Clinton County motorcycle patrol officers, George Howland and Ferdinand Alexander, were badly wounded by desperadoes on the road about one mile south of DeWitt. The officers had been hired by the County Board of Supervisors and were looking for illegal liquor traffickers.

While on patrol, the officers noticed three men in an out-of-state car, driving north toward DeWitt. They stopped the car on suspicion of running liquor and got more than they bargained for.

Two of the three men got out. Alexander searched the driver. He was large and heavy-set, rather dark, with a red face. He had on a blue suit. He was about 45 years of age. Alexander then searched the car and found a suit case containing burglar tools. There were also two sawed-off shot-guns in the car. The man still in the car, in the front seat on the passenger side, pulled a gun and started to shoot. He was about 5 feet 8 inches tall, and about 35 years of age. He wore a Palm Beach suit. Just as he started firing another car came from the south. The officers couldn't shoot for fear of hitting the people in that car. Both officers were on the same side of the car and both were hit by gunfire.

It was all over in a twinkling. Neither officer fired a shot. The officers who believed they were dealing with booze runners apparently were off their guard.

The two desperadoes jumped into the car and the three sped off towards DeWitt.

Mrs. W. F Holt, who lived on the west side of the road, saw the shooting. She took Officer Howland into her home, and tried to stop the bleeding. She called Dr. Riggert in DeWitt who hurried to the scene, applied first aid then hurried Howland to Clinton. In the meantime,

a Davenport car had come along, and picked up Officer Alexander, taking him to Clinton.

At Jane Lamb hospital, Howland lay "fighting for his life" with two bullets in his body. One cut thru his liver, the other lodged in his lung. Alexander was shot thru his side.

The officers gave good descriptions of the bandits; traveling in an old green open Cadillac touring car with Nebraska license. The driver weighed about 200 pounds. He was "rough-looking" and had a dark complexion. The man who did the shooting was about 35 years of age, of medium build, and wore a light Palm Beach suit. The third member of the gang had the appearance of a "dope fiend", with a long, peaked face.

The bandits were trailed as far as West Branch, where the track was lost. Police and sheriff's departments of Clinton and adjoining counties



1925 green Cadillac

joined in the man-hunt. News of the shooting was broadcast by radio, telephone and telegraph. A DeWitt airplane was pressed into service.

O C Capper took to the air as soon as news came of the shooting. Mr. Capper remained in the air until dusk, circling over the territory in an attempt to locate the car and its crew of desperadoes.

Vigilantes took the field, armed with sawed-off shot-guns. Captain William J Conway of the Howitzer company and several of his men joined in the hunt. Marshal Jack Moore and his deputy, Hosmer Jacobs, patrolled the region. Deputy Sheriff Walter Heldt was at the county jail when the news came in. He took a sawed-off shot-gun and drove to DeWitt to join in the hunt. Motorcycle Policeman Fred Lehman also covered a wide territory on his machine during the late afternoon and evening.

Which way did the bandits go? Did they go thru DeWitt? Did they turn east or west? There was a conflict of opinion as to their probable route. There was a radio report that a car answering the description of the bandit machine got gas in Tipton. Another report said the car was seen at Big Rock, just over the border of Scott County.

Meanwhile, Dr. Maurice Scanlan of DeWitt and Dr. Jordan of Clinton operated on Alexander, who lived in Grand Mound. His injuries were very serious. The bullet from the bandit's revolver had entered the right hip, and had come out at the center of the abdomen. George Howland had been operated on shortly after he had been brought in. That operation was performed by Dr F. O. Kershner of Clinton and Dr. Riggert of DeWitt.

That the desperadoes turned west at DeWitt over Lincoln highway was pretty well established. Mrs. Stevenson, who lives near Unity Corners, west of DeWitt, reports that the car stopped at her place and the men purchased five gallons of gasoline. What appeared to be the same party is reported to have stopped at a farm house two miles west

of Dixon, Iowa, while its occupants asked the nearest way to Tipton.

The sheriff said he picked up the trail of the fugitives at Tipton and traced them to the town of Springdale, where a car with three men stopped. It was boiling hot and one of the men entered a garage and got two buckets of water for the radiator. The fellow who got water for the car, was of medium, height, rather slender, and wore a pin-stripe suit. In the back seat was an old man, who talked as though he were intoxicated. The third man had light hair. The car then headed towards Iowa City. No further news of it was heard.

Reports from Jane Lamb hospital stated that Officer Howland's condition remains quite critical but Alexander shows some improvement.

Many false reports were circulated as to the alleged capture of the would-be assassins.

Officers Howland and Alexander, lying wounded in Jane Lamb hospital, identified photographs of two notorious Iowa criminals, one as the man who drove the green Cadillac bandit car, and the other as the gunman of the party, Ed Welch, alias Ed Doyle, aged about 27, who participated in a bank robbery at Farlin, Iowa, and Jim Davis, an elderly man, a desperate criminal, who escaped from the penitentiary at Ft. Madison some months ago while serving a life term.

With heavy suspicion resting on Welch and Davis, authorities are making every effort to find them, and learn the identity of the third member of the gang. Naturally the old pals of these two notorious criminals are being sought as the possible third man in the deal.

One of these pals is "Tex" Maynard, released last year from the state prison at Ft. Madison. "Tex," with Davis and Welch, were former members of the old "Red" Bruzette gang which terrorized the highways, hijacked bootleggers and robbed banks in northwest Iowa in 1918 and 1919.

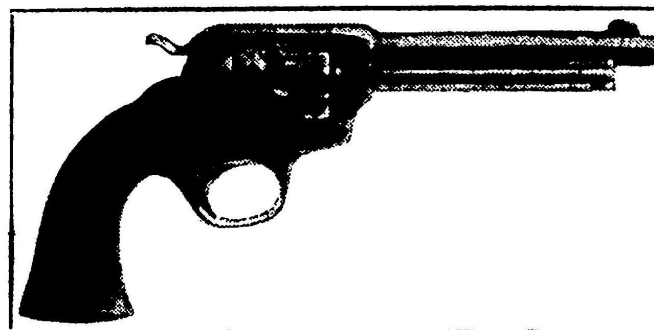
BANDITS WHO SHOT DEPUTIES



Jim McGraw.



Bob Scott.



The Gun.

SHOT DOWN BY BANDITS



Ferd Alexander.



George Howland.

Descriptions of Davis and Welch were broadcast and telegraphed throughout this entire area, and a man-hunt was in progress, following the identification of the men as occupants of the bandit car.

George W. Atkins, one of the shrewdest and most experienced special agents of the state department of justice, was here cooperating with the sheriff in the case. The authorities are also in touch with Jim Ridsen, chief of the Iowa Department of Investigation in Des. Moines.

Davis and Welch were, by reputation, two of the "toughest boys" in the west. Both will shoot on sight. Either will go to any extreme to stay out of the clutches of the law. Davis has a life sentence hanging over him, for killing a policeman in Sioux City. After being sent to Ft. Madison he succeeded in making his escape. Welch doubtless has a long prison sentence hanging over him for blowing the Farlin bank, a crime in which he was positively identified. His "pals" were caught and sent up. He escaped, and has since been sought. Both men are thoroughly desperate characters. They sleep with their guns beside them. Stories, are told of their having eaten in restaurants with their guns in their laps.

George Howland and Ferd Alexander were making progress towards recovery. Their condition was declared to be satisfactory. They identified "Tex" Maynard as the third member of the bandit gang.

A very clever piece of work was done in fixing the identity of the three bandits. Descriptions of the men furnished by Howland, Alexander and others who saw the fellows fitted pretty well with those of Welch, Davis and Maynard. It was known that these men probably would travel in the same company. It was also known that they were the type of men who would do the job. Building up a system of probabilities, those who secured the identification selected photos of the three men from a "rogues gallery" to which they had access. To be sure there always is the possibility of mistakes, but the thing looks pretty sure.

With a working knowledge of the identity of the bandits, their photographs and descriptions, and with an intimate knowledge of their habits and "haunts", the authorities have started out on a quest to catch them. Everyone realizes the difficulties which surround this task. All three are desperate men, who shoot on sight. They will not be taken without a battle, unless surprised.

Des Moines, Iowa, June 15, a reward of \$250 for the apprehension of Jim Davis and a reward of \$350 on Welch's head, one hundred for his capture, the rest is for his conviction, was offered by Governor John Hammill.

The identification of Maynard was made at Jane Lamb hospital by the wounded deputies.

But "Tex" declares, he knows nothing about the shooting of the two deputies. He was in Freeport, Ill, on Monday, June 8, the day of the shooting, he declares.

"Tex" Maynard was arraigned before Judge Homer I. Smith in municipal court on a charge of assault with intent to commit murder for the shooting of Traffic Officers Howland and Alexander. A preliminary hearing and bail in the sum of \$25,000 was ordered. He made no attempt to raise a bond and today continued to be imprisoned in the county jail.

At Maynard's preliminary hearing, George Howland could not positively identify him. When questioned about his previous identification of Maynard, he sighted effects of morphine affecting his judgement. Maynard was released.

Sheriff E R Cooke has been out of town working on clues.. He and James Risdon, have been diligently working and had the real "dope" on the case. They have determined that Welch and Davis were not the bandits. The real bandits were R S Evans, alias Bob Scott who was the driver, and Jim McGraw, alias Jim Cellan, alias Jim Sellen, who did the shooting. Both were in the Oklahoma penitentiary.

The story about the Clinton County crime "broke" when Scott and McGraw talked freely about the day the officers were shot. They named George McKnight as the third member of the gang and of their intent to rob the Bettendorf bank that day. This job was abandoned because their "spotter," the man in the back seat, of the car, found things unfavorable in Bettendorf for the robbery.

McGraw/Cellan/Sellen, "king of bank robbers", was arrested in Kansas City several months after the Clinton County shooting, was convicted of bank robbery, and was sent to the Oklahoma state penitentiary to serve a forty years sentence. Subsequently he escaped and was arrested in Minneapolis as a fugitive from justice, and was taken back to the Oklahoma prison. Sheriff E. R. Cooke received a message informing him of the capture. McGraw/Cellan/Sellen, was wanted in this county on a charge of complicity in shooting of the two deputies, but he was not brought here, inasmuch as he faced a long prison sentence in Oklahoma. He was also wanted for bank robberies in Illinois, North Dakota and South Dakota.

R S Evans/Bob Scott served a long term in the penitentiary at McAlester, Oklahoma. He is reputed to have done the shooting when Howland and Alexander stopped the bandits on the DeWitt-Davenport road.

McKnight, the man in the Palm Beach suit who occupied the rear seat, partially covered with, blankets, as he was ill, was brought here from Oklahoma by the Sheriff, but he was not tried in this county for the shooting. He was taken to Peoria, Ill, to be tried there for robbery.

FACING CONSEQUENCES

Clinton County Court reviews probationers' cases every week

BY JENNA BLOUNT
JBLOUNT@CLINTONHERALD.COM

Every Friday morning, in a courtroom on the east side of the second floor of the Clinton County Courthouse, is what County Attorney Mike Wolf calls “consequence court.”

District Associate Judge Kimberly Shepherd oversees the proceedings each week in which approximately 35 probationers filter into the courtroom for review. “My predecessor, Judge [Phillip] Tabor, did not do those review hearings,” Shepherd, appointed in February 2021, said. “I have chosen to do them, because I feel it’s important that people are held accountable, that when the Court orders something that they do it, and that we have a way to check on that.”

Clinton County, representing 1.4% of the state’s population, is responsible for 16 of 148, or 9.25%, of felony B drug convictions in Iowa from 2019-2024 that resulted in prison sentences, according to the Iowa Department of Management.

Felony B drug offenses are outlined in Iowa Code as carrying a penalty of 25-50 years in prison, along with significant fines, upon conviction of charges involving the manufacture, delivery, or possession with intent to distribute large quantities of controlled substances, including methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl.

In other cases, defendants are given the opportunity for rehabilitation through bench probation, answering directly to the Court rather than a probation officer.

“Not everyone can go to prison,” Assistant County Attorney Robin Strausser said in an email dated Oct. 24. “One size does not fit all.”

During review hearings of bench probationers,

proof is asked by Strausser and Assistant County Attorneys Ross Barlow and Lisa Maidak for completion of provisions stipulated in a defendant’s sentencing order.

“We have enlisted the extra efforts of many people in the community,” Strausser said. “We are so grateful to everyone in our community who provide that treatment or classes, etc., and we appreciate the extra efforts they make on our behalf to provide the documentation we need.”

When an individual walks into the courtroom, Strausser said it’s evident whether they’ve been doing what they’re supposed to do.

“They’re a different person,” she said. “Sometimes, our defendants need encouragement and, sometimes, they need ‘yelled’ at, in order to get them through their probation.”

Probationers continue to have review hearings, until all sentencing provisions have been completed.

If a probationer fails to appear for review, a warrant is issued for their arrest.

If the probationer appears but makes it clear that they are unwilling to complete sentencing provisions, the individual faces serving a suspended jail sentence.

“The Judge has been generous in following most of our recommendations,” Strausser said.

Shepherd stated that the number of people to have their probation revoked to serve time in jail is fairly low.



Assistant County Attorneys Robin Strausser and Lisa Maidak are pictured Friday in between review hearings of bench probationers in the Clinton County Courthouse. (Jenna Blount | Clinton Herald)

“I don’t ever revoke someone on a first review — I always give them at least a second chance,” she said. “As long as someone is moving forward, I give them more time, because it’s more important that they finish their substance abuse treatment or finish their domestic abuse classes, because that’s going to help them be more successful in the future, and that’s going to benefit the community if they don’t get rearrested.”

The Iowa Department of Corrections reported a recidivism rate for fiscal years 2022-2025 just under 33% — the lowest in Iowa in a decade, attributed to a focus on practices like community-based treatment, increased access to vocational and educational opportunities, improved case management training, and collaboration with community partners.

“The County Attorney’s Office is happy to put in the extra time to review all these cases,” Strausser said. “We have accomplished so much with this program, and we are proud and grateful to everyone, including the Court, for making this happen.”

Chasing scammers and protecting the scammed

BY JENNA BLOUNT
JBLOUNT@CLINTONHERALD.COM

Randy Meier, director of the Sheriff's Office Seniors vs. Crime unit, recalls an old farmer who lived near Grand Mound.

"He lost his wife in middle age," Meier said. "I don't think he ever recovered from it."

The farmer became involved with psychics, while mail continued to arrive falsely notifying him he'd won a sweepstakes or lottery to which he would continuously send money.

"I went out and talked to him," Meier said. "As we're talking, we're sitting at his kitchen table, and he shows me this stack of mail he's got."

The farmer said to Meier: "I know they're all a scam, but there's one that's not. And that's the one that is going to make me rich."

The farmer then looked around the kitchen and told Meier: "There's an aura that just came in the room here. It's my deceased wife who's giving me advice here."

Meier left having not made headway on helping the farmer to change his behavior of giving into scams.

Just before the farmer died six weeks later, the farmer's caregiver contacted Meier and told him to call an ambulance.

"As they were loading him into the ambulance," Meier said, remembering what were likely the farmer's last words before he died, "he yelled to this caregiver. He said, 'Stay here, because Publisher's Clearinghouse is going to be delivering my money today!'"

"Those are the things I'm up against," Meier continued. "I have a hard time convincing people sometimes. With him, I never did."

Meier told the story from his Clinton County Courthouse office where he was collecting the bank records of a woman who believed she was dating a high-ranking military officer and had lost about \$100,000 in a year.

The amount of money lost nationwide in romance scams between 2020 and 2024, he said, has quadrupled.

"Because it's so effective," Meier explained. "They get hooked up on social media. Facebook is the worst offender."

Meier spent 33 years as a detective for the Clinton Police Department, before he in 2012 became the director of the Seniors vs. Crime unit.

The Seniors vs. Crime unit that he heads, unique to Clinton County, started about 1992. It was organized as a collaboration of the Clinton County Sheriff's Office, Clinton Police Department, DeWitt Police Department, Camanche Police Department, and AARP of Clinton County to come together with local senior citizens to reduce crimes by which they've been affected.

The program evolved into being part of the Clinton County Sheriff's Office by which it is funded, investigating fraud, scams, or elder abuse and providing public education through columns published throughout the area.

"I'm here to provide outreach to the entire community—not just the senior citizen community—and keep the entire community aware of frauds and scams," Meier explained.

The two main reasons crimes go unreported are fear and embarrassment, he said, but the Seniors vs. Crime unit acts as a liaison with law enforcement for older Iowans comprising the most rapidly growing segment of the population.

"They aren't getting scammed any more than anybody else, really," Meier said. "In fact, younger people probably fall for more scams. They just don't report them as often, and they don't lose as much money."

Emotions of fear or excitement often cause older individuals to fall victim to the "grandparent scam" or "lottery scam," he said.

"When people do fall for scams, that sometimes is the first sign of cognitive decline," Meier said. "Once someone is scammed, it's like flies to honey."

Meier, himself, has even been the target of scams.

"I get the same text messages that everybody else does," he said. "My credit card has been compromised which—who hasn't had their credit card compromised."

Anything that comes across Meier's desk goes into a federal data-

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***RANDY MEIER,
Director of the Sheriff’s
Office Seniors vs. Crime unit***

base for prosecution or referred to the Iowa Attorney General’s Office or FBI.

“I’m a police officer at heart,” Meier said. “I make a case on every call that comes in to me. I document it.”

Meier, in 2019, was awarded an Award of Excellence in Victim Services by the U.S. Attorney General’s Office. In 2021, he was named a Consumer Protection Hero by the Attorney’s Office.

More often than a case leading to an arrest, Meier has found success in getting lost money returned, however, as was the case for a local woman scammed into sending \$75,000 to a non-existent orphanage in Africa.

The difficulty in a scam investigation leading to the arrest of a scammer, though, lies in the fact that 75% of the time, the money given to a scammer is immediately transferred to outside the country.

“Those success stories are few and far between,” Meier said. “The stars have to be in alignment.”



Randy Meier, director of the Sheriff’s Office Seniors vs. Crime unit

Scams continue to evolve, with typical reported losses of \$3,000-\$4,000 in 2012 having become \$25,000, \$40,000, or greater, today, as well as now running rampant in cryptocurrency.

“The actual scams—the scripts on the scams—don’t change all that much,” Meier said. “What does change is the way money is handled and the means of communication between people.”

At the conclusion of every published column Meier writes, he asks that readers: “Let me know about scams, fraud, or other crookedness you run across. Most of what I learn, I learn from you.”

Seniors vs. Crime at the Clinton County Sheriff’s Office can be contacted by calling (563) 242-9211, ext. 4433, or by emailing Meier at randymeier@gapa911.us

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