

Crime and Punishment in Hartney

Hartney's first (and only?) murder mystery

The story begins on a fine Sunday in May 1914. Russell Graham was riding his bike into Hartney from his home northeast of town when he heard gunshots. He wondered briefly about who would be shooting on a Sunday, and thought no more about it.

Until later....

Tom Hill had recently arrived from England, and for eighteen months he had been working as a farm hand for George Baker in order to learn farming methods. Harry Green arrived after him and had been there about five weeks.

On Sunday, May 17, when George Baker and his sisters returned from church, Tom Hill wasn't there. Believing that he might have gone to visit his brother they thought little of it. When he did not return that day, or the next, they got concerned. A search was undertaken and Hill's body, showing two bullet wounds, was found in an old well with planks thrown over it to conceal it.

All eyes turned towards Harry Green. Nobody else was known to have been with Hill on the day of his disappearance. And he was a "newcomer". Who else would have done it?

Green was arrested, charged with murder and placed in the Hartney jail to await trial, while the whole community buzzed with rumors and conjectures.

An inquest with a jury of local people was held in Hartney on May 30. They heard the observations of the Baker family. They learned that two separate groups of neighbours had heard shots on that morning, when no one but Green would have been with Hill. They ruled the death a murder. Magistrate C.D. Batty formally remanded the accused.

Although Green's trial was held in Brandon, it was the town and the people of Hartney who were in the spotlight. It was what we today would call a media event. The press covered every detail daily with headlines shouting out new developments. "Tremendous crowds" were reported.

The victim's brother, Frank Hill, swore that items found on the accused belonged to the deceased.

...a search was undertaken and Hill's body, showing two bullet wounds, was found in an old well...

Mr. Green had some previous minor offenses in England, but no history of violence. Witnesses recalled Green's "flushed" condition when the family arrived back from church that afternoon. But Harry Green stubbornly and consistently denied his guilt.

The defense contended that there was no evidence that the supposed murder weapon had been used, let alone by Green.

The jury, however, found him guilty, and although they recommended mercy, the judge sentenced him to hang. Shortly thereafter he made a startling jailhouse confession while awaiting execution. The full text of that confession was printed in the Brandon Sun.

In the words of Harry Green: "... we decided to go out and shoot gophers. I picked up the gun from a corner of the stable, and, as Hill had just got through the door in front of me, a sudden impulse, for which I cannot account, came over me and I raised the gun and shot him in the back." That settled it.

On February 25, 1915, Harry Green was executed in the Brandon Jail, one of only three executions carried out in that institution.

Sources:

Graham, Mary. Personal Reminiscence. Hartney and District Historical Committee. *A Century of Living - Hartney & District 1882 - 1982*. Steinbach. Derksen Printers, 1982.
Minnedosa Tribune. 2105: Feb. 25. March 4.
The Brandon Daily Sun. 1914: May 22, 23, 26, 27, 30. June 2-5, 12, 19. Oct. 2. Nov. 17, 20, 23-28 Dec. 12. 1915: Feb. 24.
Vandusen, Jack. Personal Reminiscence.

◀ *Headline from the Brandon Sun, May 22, 1914.*

**FOUL MURDER WAS
REVEALED TODAY
ON HARTNEY FARM**