

Murder in air with Karen this week

By Karen Zach, Around the County

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EDITOR'S NOTE: I have never been able to write fiction; well, that is unless I can find something non-fiction to jumpstart my creative juices, then watch out! Example: a friend of mine (Lena – photo thanks) told me about her ancestor being killed at the Yount's Woolen Mill one night when he was guarding the place. There were no accounts of the happening as none of our newspapers went back that far; thus, I researched our area to find out about the economics of the times and came up with a plan. Whether it is anywhere near what happened or not, it makes for a great tale – hope you enjoy it and next time you're in need of an idea for a story, check out your ancestors and ya' might find a great one just waiting to be written. Also note: this is one of the entries in my Montgomery Murder Mysteries that I'd still love to get published, someday when I have some extra bucks – lol. Read on – Lost Love.

My name be Tobe Moran. I seen more than 4 score year. Heard tell of some young pup collecting murder stories, so figured it's time I be telling mine. It happened a few days before Christmas in the year 1838. Me and my brother, Abe, had no money to buy our poor children food. We both had worked six weeks for the just begun newly built Yount's Mill but weren't yet paid. We needed money bad. Abe knew that Adam Yount were talking on addin' his younger brother Dan to the payroll and we knew for certain Younts would get pay 'fore we folk did. Suppose we shoulda' just up and quit instead a what we did do, but we were desperate men. Abe had seen where Yount kept his strong box and eyed a good deal of coin and paper money in it, too. I never were a smart man but my mother taught me right from wrong and I knew it weren't right to steal, yet my sweet Caroline was home with dear Jacob named for his grandfather Moran and little Sarah after my ma. I'd watched the eyes of six nieces and nephews become hollow, too. I knew something had to be done, so I said yes to Abe's scheme.

We waited until two in the morning when even the drunks would be home in bed until we headed for the mill. It were all dark ceptin' a faint light in the far upper window. Grouchily, I told Abe, "Let's go home."

He barked back, "We can't!" Knew Abe was right. We needed money to help feed our children. Weren't even thinkin' on Christmas gifts – figured we'd put an orange or apple in each stocking so that the children could save those for later.

So we broke the latch on the front door and started in. We knew our way around well inside. Knew how to dodge the woolen machines, where to find the crude stairway to the second floor and how to sneak through the room where Mr. Yount and his assistant, Philip Ross worked. Ross worked doing books from 6-2. Mr. Yount seldom appeared before 10. Abe didn't do his homework as he didn't know that Yount loved Ross so well that he'd promised him double pay to be night watchman, too. Guess that was because Ross had more mouths to feed that we Moran brothers put together. Ross' first night working from midnight on, until dawn brought the mill's first set of workers was that fateful December 1838 one.

That there upstairs area were real funny like. It had the large room where the wool was carded, then a few smaller ones for storage and offices – each of them rooms had a door on each side. When we stepped foot into that upper rear room with the faint light, we didn't see Philip Ross behind the door, munching on a hunk of bread. Philip Ross saw us, though. We turned to run, but Ross was faster. He leaped up by Abe demanding him to stop. Abe just reacted, took down a hammer hanging on the wall and banged Ross in the head. It happened so quick like. Ross fell to the floor. "Oh, God, Abe, what have you done? Is he breathing?" Abe cried, "I don't know. Help me move him back into the light." We each jerked on his arms, pulling him back into the room. His face was ghost-like. When I put my head to his chest, I heard a bit of a beat.

"What'll we do, Abe? He's breathing. He saw us and knows who we are."

Abe spoke the inevitable – we had to finish him off. Abe's plan was to lift him up and throw him out the window. Not only was the building a high, two-story, it was on a steep cliff leading down to Sugar Crick. We aimed very carefully, making sure he fell into the Mill's wheel. Made sure to sweep our footprints clean all the way down the stairs and out the door. Didn't even touch the money. Too scared, I guess. We threw the broken latch down my well at home. Both Abe and I went to work a mere three hours later. We made sure to act shocked and amazed at Ross' death. Seems the wheel on the mill tore his body up so bad that no one noticed the bump on his head. In fact, parts of his body was lost forever in the crick. When Adam Yount told us of the death, tears flowed from his deep blue eyes. He handed us our pay and a healthy Christmas bonus. It was the first time I'd noticed what a tender, caring man Adam really was. Our children had a feast with toys for each that Christmas, and I had a most heavy heart.

No one ever suspected either of the Moran brothers of the murder of Philip Ross. No one ever figured the murder out but Adam Yount did hire a private detective who failed his job. Brother Abe left the Crawfordsville area two years after that fateful night, guilt-ridden and gray-haired. I've stayed on here, helping the Ross family all I could. Neither Abe nor I knew the number of children Philip Ross really had. Cynthia Ross was left with eleven, the youngest, James Shelby Ross, being just eight-months old. James later joined the Union Forces, along with three of his brothers, and thus, Cynthia had even more to add to her burden. Not only me, however, but the Yount family and many neighbors and friends helped Cynthia raise those children, although, of course, the real burden lay solely on her. I always feared one of those younguns would marry mine, but they never did. That guilt I couldn't carry. It's only now I want to clear my conscience as my time will soon be here. I'm not sure what my maker will do with me but I am thankful to tell this story for posterity.

As for Cynthia Ross, she died last year. Rest In Peace dear woman and your man! Her wake was one of the largest ever seen around, as she was a most admired and well-loved woman, having raised all those children. Each became a productive citizen of 'ol Montgomery County. True she had a little help, but on the whole, she did it by herself, as Cynthia never married another, although bein' as pretty and lively as she was, she sure had many a chance. When asked why she never wed again, her reply always broke my heart when I'd hear her answer, "I lost my only love back in December '38."



Photo courtesy Lena Harper