



THE UNSOLVED 1903 MURDER OF GLORY WHALEN

H. David Vuckson

I am by no means the first Collingwood writer to recount this tragic story from long ago. Scotty Carmichael and Anita Miles, to name a few, have preceded me but the definitive, in-depth account of Glory's murder, the frustrating investigation and the subsequent exasperating inquest is found in a 2007 book by Morgan Ian Adams, a former Editor of the former Enterprise-Bulletin newspaper. His account is also available as an e-book. I highly recommend Ian's book not only for his coverage of the subject matter but also for the snapshot it provides of Collingwood and its people at the turn of the 20th Century.

Bertha Gloria Whalen (her full legal name) was born on October 31, 1889 and baptized on December 29th of that year in St. Mary's Catholic Church, Collingwood about one year after the church at the corner of Ontario and Elgin Streets was erected. She was the third and middle child of the five children (3 boys/2 girls) of James Henry Whalen and Frances Fanny Riordan who lived on a farm on the Poplar Sideroad south of Collingwood. As others in that era did (including my grandfather Hewson when he lived on a farm on the Sixth Line near Batteaux when a young man), Glory walked along the Grand Trunk Railway tracks to go to school in Collingwood. For clarification, there were two sets of Grand Trunk railway tracks coming into Collingwood at

that time and both of them crossed the Poplar Sideroad on opposite sides of Hurontario St./Highway 24 (now County Rd. 124): the main line from Allandale on the east side of town and the branch line from Beeton on the west side of town. This story concerns the main line from Allandale. The Grand Trunk system was absorbed into the Canadian National Railway network in 1923, two decades after the murder.

St. Mary's Catholic School at the north-west corner of St. Paul and Ontario Streets (demolished in 1974), half a block from the railway tracks, did not open until April 1908 nearly five years after this tragic event; as stated below, Glory's destination was what was known at the time as East Ward Public School (renamed Connaught School in 1911) on Napier St. On the fine spring morning of May 27, 1903 Glory set out for school as usual. It was the last time her family saw her alive. Part way along her journey on foot along the Grand Trunk tracks, she met with foul play which, to this day, has never been solved.

When Glory failed to return home from school in the afternoon it was at first thought she might be at the home of one of her friends. When it was learned she had not even shown up at school, anxious search parties set out continuing on into the night. Her body was found the next morning in a clearing in a grove of cedar trees on the east side of the railway tracks about 500 feet south of Collins St.

No certain motive for the murder was ever established. It was not robbery because the 35 cents she had in her possession when she left home that morning were still with the body (that amount of money would have a value of \$9.69 in purchasing power in 2017). Her umbrella and school books were there as well. She was fully clothed.

Medical examination by Dr. McFaul showed she had not been raped. The cause of death was a bullet in the brain. It was speculated that rape *may* have been the intent but instead Glory's screams caused her attackers to panic and shoot her.

Various theories were offered to explain this tragedy. There were stories and rumours of tramps and peddlers hanging out and camping in this rural wooded area. Two nearby residents waited far too late in the scheme of things to relate what they saw and/or heard on the morning of the murder. One of them told a story of seeing two men wrestling with a girl on the railway tracks and carrying her off into the bush. Another heard the screams of a child and the sound of a gun but waited several days before telling anyone, thinking it was not important [!]. Various "two men" suspects were spotted in multiple places over a wide area of Ontario, but none were convincing. There was a fake confession from a man in prison in England along with claims from mediums with messages from the spirit world purporting to identify the murderer, lured by the then-very substantial reward money offered by the Town and the Province. The combined amount of \$650.00 was equal to nearly \$18,000.00 in 2017 dollars.

The curious public, once news of the murder reached Collingwood, had gone out to the site in large numbers and many pairs of feet trampled the ground extensively thereby destroying any evidence that might have been found. Today it is standard practice to put yellow Police tape around a crime scene and to station security people to guard it while investigators do their work but that did not happen in 1903. It seems that everything that could possibly happen to stymie this investigation did happen. The subsequent inquest was forced to conclude that Glory Whalen was killed by a "person or persons

unknown". And so that verdict remains unchanged today 115 years after her murder and is likely to remain so this side of eternity.

Glory's father seems to have come unhinged after the event and within a year or so he subsequently abandoned his wife, his four remaining children, his farm and his debts and in so doing cast suspicion upon himself for some connection to his daughter's death. He ended up living in Fort William/Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay) where his brother Daniel had died of small pox in May 1900; there were other Whalen family members living in Thunder Bay as well. Recent research in 2018 has revealed that in the end, Henry died a slow, agonizing death from stomach cancer of three years duration. He passed away on August 10, 1918 in St. Joseph's Hospital, Port Arthur in his 61st year. His "*immediate* cause of death" was "inanition" a medical term for exhaustion from starvation (due to the cancer). Henry Whalen's body was returned to Collingwood for burial. His wife eventually sold the farm and she and the remaining children scattered, all of them eventually ending up living in Ohio. Frances Whalen's body would also be returned to Collingwood for burial in the 1930's.

In the 1950's I and one or two friends would sometimes each take a bottle of pop and some sandwiches and leave our bikes at what was then the dead end of Collins St. by the railway embankment. We would then climb over the fence and walk south on the tracks to the bridge over the Pretty River (the bridge nearest to the Poplar Sideroad) and have a picnic there and, depending on the time of day, maybe watch a train go by (and when we returned to Collins St. our bikes were still there!). As we proceeded south from Collins St., we had no idea of the tragedy that took place nearby more than half a century earlier. Even in the 1950's the railway track south of Collins St. was surrounded

largely by forest on both sides, long before the present modern homes were built on Lockhart Rd., Krista Court and Williams St. In those days, except for a brick farmhouse at the very end of Collins St. on the north side beside the railway, Harry Bell's house on the south side was about the last outpost of civilization before the then-busy rail line. This entire area was rural on "the edge of town". The large then-empty area of land north of Collins St. now filled with modern homes on Sproule Ave., Bell Blvd. and Alice St. was called "The Commons" back then. Another feature of Collins/Cameron St. at that time was the Bell Telephone long distance wires between Owen Sound and Barrie that ran along the south side of the street: three crossbars and dozens of glass insulators for the wires on each pole. These crossed the railway tracks on extra-tall poles and then disappeared into the bush on the east side on their way to Barrie.

The former Grand Trunk/Canadian National/Barrie-Collingwood Railway tracks north of the Poplar Sideroad were removed in 2015. In 2017 the Town of Collingwood sold its portion of the now-decommissioned (since 2011) railway right-of-way between Collingwood and Utopia to Simcoe County for its preservation for a future transportation and utility corridor. The recent removal of the tracks in the south end of town makes Glory's murder a further step removed from the infrastructure that existed in 1903 when there were multiple passenger and freights trains every day. The concept of a "train trail" was unknown at that time.

In June 2009 a parkette was dedicated to the memory of Glory Whalen near the spot where her body was found. In September of that year on a visit to Collingwood, Pam and I accompanied by Christine Cowley walked down Collins St. and along the track to the parkette where a

large memorial stone donated by Rick and Susan Lloyd was erected telling of Glory's death. The text engraved on the stone, and written by Christine Cowley, reads as follows:

“ON MAY 27, 1903, 13-YEAR-OLD GLORY WHALEN SET OUT FOR CONNAUGHT PUBLIC SCHOOL FROM HER FAMILY’S FARM ON POPLAR SIDEROAD, A 30 MINUTE WALK. GLORY NEVER REACHED HER DESTINATION. AFTER AN ALL-NIGHT SEARCH, GLORY’S BODY WAS DISCOVERED IN A THICKET OF CEDARS JUST A FEW YARDS FROM THE GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY TRACKS. THIS STONE MARKS THE LOCATION WHERE GLORY WAS FOUND, FULLY CLOTHED, HER ARMS FOLDED ACROSS HER CHEST AND HER BELONGINGS NEARBY. AN AUTOPSY REVEALED THAT THE CAUSE OF DEATH WAS A GUNSHOT WOUND.

MONTHS OF FRUITLESS INVESTIGATION TURNED UP NUMEROUS LEADS, INCLUDING BIZARRE CLAIMS OF PSYCHIC KNOWLEDGE OF THE CRIME, HOWEVER NO RELIABLE EVIDENCE WAS UNCOVERED AS TO THE IDENTITY OF GLORY’S KILLER OR THE MOTIVE FOR THE CRIME. THE MURDER OF GLORY WHALEN REMAINS ONE OF THE OLDEST CASES IN THE ANNALS OF UNSOLVED CRIMES IN CANADA.

GLORY WAS INTERRED IN ST. MARY’S CATHOLIC CHURCH CEMETERY.”

To this day, the precise location of Glory's grave in St. Mary's Cemetery on Raglan St. is uncertain and unmarked although there is a gravestone for her paternal grandparents Catherine Poole (died October 20, 1881) and James Whalen. The parkette and memorial tablet where Glory's body was found now serve as a fitting epitaph for a young life so full of hope and promise and so cruelly taken in the innocence of childhood.

David Vuckson is a great-grandson of pioneer Collingwood merchant R. W. O'Brien. His roots in town go back to 1875. David and his wife Pamela live in Victoria, B. C.