

The Mad Butcher of Plainfield



LAW 'n HISTORY

By R. Marc Kantrowitz

Elmo Ueek and the unassuming but odd Ed Gein chatted about the mysterious disappearance of tavern owner Mary Hogan. Older and unattractive, the nearly 200-pound Hogan had served those residing in the sleepy town of Plainfield, Wisconsin, with alcohol and a ramshackle place in which to drink it. The surroundings were much like the town itself — small, dark, quiet and rundown.

"If you had spent more time courting Mary," Ueek told Gein, "she'd be cooking for you instead of missing."

"Eddie merely rolled his eyes," Ueek later recalled, "and wiggled his nose like a dog sniffing a skunk and said, 'She's not missing. She's down at the house now.' But Eddie was always talking crazy like that."

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Ed Gein adored his mother, Augusta, notwithstanding her harsh ways and her intense dislike of nearly everyone, especially

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women. The way they flaunted their bodies, flirted with men, wore indecent clothing and make-up, all immoral and evil. It was all against God's supreme will and all deserved to be punished for disobeying his word.

The large boned, coarse-faced Augusta was not shy about her beliefs, instilled harshly upon her by her father who used beatings to ensure that she did not stray. Augusta, in turn, became her father: rigid, humorless, unloving and domineering.

Unattractive in mind, spirit and body, she unsurprisingly had few males who exhibited any interest whatsoever in her. Until George, whom she married. Sex was infrequent, but enough to result in two unwanted sons, Henry and Ed. Augusta found that, like her husband, they were of no value, all lustful, sin-seeking, loud, malodorous and offensive.

Given her view of the world, in 1914 she moved the family to a 195-acre farm in the middle of nowhere Indiana, miles away from temptation and evil. She saw to it that few visited her well-kept house.

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While Ed did well in his studies, he was in reality a social leper.

Meek and somewhat effeminate, slight of build, easily brought to tears and unable to take a joke, he quickly became an outcast. A droopy left eyelid and an odd grin served as ammunition for those who teased them. He painfully experienced his mother's teachings about the wickedness of the outside world.

Shortly after his older brother, Henry, questioned his brother's deep motherly devotion, Henry, while in Ed's company, died under mysterious circumstances. With the father also deceased, only Ed and Augusta were left, and that was to be short-lived.



The unassuming Ed Gein

AP PHOTO

With the death of Augusta in 1945, Gein's home, still without electricity and plumbing, rapidly deteriorated into filth and disarray, soon matching his own shabby and rank appearance.

At night he shared his time with loneliness and thoughts of evil women and those who had abused him — and his mother, whom he missed greatly.

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For a decade, starting in the late 1940s, people in the area started slowly disappearing. And then it was Mary Hogan's turn. Able to handle herself, Hogan obviously had been shot and dragged away, as evidenced by the blood smears on the floor.

But by whom? And when, given that people were coming and going at the bar at various times throughout the day? For two years the killing remained a mystery, until November 1957.

When 58-year-old Bernice Worden, stout like Mary Hogan and Augusta Gein, went missing from her store, suspicion immediately

focused on Gein, who had been in the shop the day before and had acted strangely.

When the police confronted him at the house of a neighbor, Gein suddenly blurted out that someone was framing him. For what, he was asked? For Mrs. Worden, he replied. What about her? Well, she's dead, ain't she? How could he know that?

The police had their man.

All that remained was searching Gein's forbidding home, which, when the police arrived, sat in utter darkness and desolation as the November night winds howled around it.

Guided by the dim hue of the beams of their service flashlights, two officers carefully entered. Try as they might, they had difficulty sidestepping the rot festering all about them. Decaying food, ripped boxes, rusted and broken farm utensils, mounds of papers and discarded cans.

When one of the officers brushed up against an object and focused a light on it, at first it appeared to be

the dead carcass of a deer, hanging by its hind legs, split and gutted. In the brief seconds it took for the hazy picture to come more sharply into focus, the officer realized that what he saw was not an animal at all, but a human, with no head, strung up by the heels, a gaping black hole oozing slime where it had been recently eviscerated. He had found Bernice Worden.

Screaming in disbelief and shock, he rushed out, vomiting. His partner quickly joined.

When the house was reentered, new horrors awaited in the form of various female body parts cut up in different forms: a half skull used as a soup bowl, skulls festooned on bedposts, objects made from human skin, boxfuls of genitalia and noses. And the severed heads of Mary Hogan and Bernice Worden.

One last horrid revulsion awaited discovery: a human body suit, neatly sewed together, complete with breasts and female genitalia and leggings. An outfit into which Gein could submerge himself, prancing around as his reincarnated mother.

As for Augusta's upstairs bedroom, it was as neat as a pin. Ed had kept it in immaculate condition; it would have made his mother proud.

Epilogue

The senseless brutality grabbed the staid 1950s' nation, which fixated on the man dubbed the Mad Butcher of Plainfield. Ultimately found not guilty due to insanity, he spent the rest of his life in an asylum, dying in 1984 at the age of 78.

Shortly after the discovery of the bodies, an inspired novelist, Robert Bloch, wrote a book, basing his mother-obsessed madman on Gein. The character was named Norman Bates; the book "Psycho." Alfred Hitchcock bought the story and made the movie, considered one of Hollywood's great classics.