



Photos: Harvard's Hasty Pudding Club — John Roosevelt, David Bacon, and Wallace Berry. Born into a wealthy Boston Brahmin family in 1914, Bacon moved to the West Coast to improve his prospects. There he married the successful, sexy Austrian cabaret singer Greta Keller. On Sept. 12, 1943, Bacon was found dead from a stab wound. His murder was never solved.

The murder of the Massachusetts Masked Marvel

By R. Marc Kantrowitz

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His grandfather was the secretary of state under one president and ambassador to France under another. His father — who served under Generals Pershing and Patton during World Wars I and II — attended Harvard and Harvard Law before entering politics, rising to the presidency of the state Senate and going on to lieutenant governor.

Born into this Boston Brahmin family in 1914, much was expected of Gaspar Griswold Bacon Jr. and his two brothers. He didn't disappoint, at the beginning at least, going to Harvard and summering on the Cape. Along the way, he befriended Franklin Delano Roosevelt's children and spent many a day at both the White House and Hyde Park.

Bitten by the acting bug, Gaspar was an active and successful member of Harvard's Hasty Pudding Club where he performed with John Roosevelt, Franklin's youngest son, and movie actor Wallace Berry. He later joined the University Players of Falmouth where he met fellow unknowns Jimmy Stewart and Henry Fonda.

Moving to New York City, the nattily attired, lean, 6-foot-2, brown-haired young Gaspar frittered about, never particularly succeeding but enjoying himself, thanks in part to the sponsorship of a rich British patron.

Believing his prospects would improve with a move to the West Coast, Gaspar, now called David, relocated there, where he met and married the successful, sexy Austrian cabaret singer Greta Keller.

Greta, who was said to have inspired Marlene Dietrich in style and voice, was a decade older than her new husband. Living well, David met Howard Hughes, who signed him to an exclusive contract to play Billy the Kid. His screen test played badly though, which, while disappointing, was not fatal as he was soon cast to star in his most prominent role in "The Masked Marvel," an exciting 12-part movie series in which the masked crusader fought the evil super spy Dr. Mura Sakima, a Japanese World War II scoundrel.

Two weeks after filming, on Sept. 12, 1943, David Bacon was dead. His pregnant wife, ill at the time, suffered a miscarriage a week after hearing of the tragedy. She had last seen her husband when he told her he was off for a swim. He never returned.

It was a Sunday, shortly after 5 p.m., when witnesses spotted a sporty car being driven erratically. It wiggled and wagged, barely missed smashing into a telephone pole, jumped the curb, and died in a bean field.

People ran to the man who staggered out of the car. "Help me, help me," David Bacon softly pleaded before collapsing.

When the police arrived, they saw a dead man with a stab wound clad only in a pair of swimming trunks. In the rear seat of his car were two objects: a wallet with a key, and a camera. The film was quickly developed and revealed a single image: the smiling victim, naked on the beach.

While police theorized that David's killer had taken the picture, little else emerged. Witnesses placed him either alone, with another man, or with a man and a woman in the car.

Evidence emerged that he had rented a small nearby cottage, which the key in the recovered wallet opened. But why the rental? Greta told of a secret diary, written in code, which revealed little.

Why hadn't David taken his three dogs along as he typically did when he went swimming? One witness, Blakely Patterson, reported that Bacon told him he was being blackmailed; a day later Patterson recanted.

Also puzzling was the location of the crime scene. Given the car's small size, questions arose as to whether the stabbing occurred in it. With little to go on, the crime eventually grew cold and, like its victim, died.

Greta picked up her life and career, traveling and performing throughout Europe before returning to New York City. Five years before she died, her throaty, sensual rendition of "Heirat" (Married) was on the soundtrack of the 1972 hit film "Cabaret."

Greta also revealed that she was a lesbian and David was gay, and that their marriage had been a cover for respectability in Hollywood. She claimed that David had had an affair with Howard Hughes. And she suspected that, perhaps, David's sexuality had something to do with his death.

Whatever the truth, it is clear that the murder of the Masked Marvel will never be solved.

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