

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #16

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

By Jim Ford

The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

THE HINMAN ROBBERY

On the afternoon of August 18, 1963, the Village of Madison experienced one of the strangest and as yet unsolved mysteries in its history. The home of Mrs. Agnes Hinman, the widow of Grove Hinman, a wealthy Madison resident, was burglarized to the tune of more than \$250,000. Upon examination of the safe by the State Police, it was found to have a second compartment. When opened, that compartment contained an additional \$351,875. A total of more than \$600,000 had been in that basement safe. Here are the facts of the case taken from the accounts of the Utica Daily Press – August 20, 1963 and August 23, 1963.

Madison – "State Police last night were investigating the theft of at least a quarter of a million dollars reported stolen Sunday afternoon from a basement safe in the home of Agnes Hinman.

Mrs. Hinman is the widow of the late Grove Hinman, who before his death March 11, 1961, was described as a wealthy automobile agent with substantial real estate and farm holdings.

The money, in five paper bags, and what were described as "several valuable papers, was apparently stolen from the house between 1:30 and 7:30 Sunday, State Police said.

Mrs. Hinman said she was accustomed to keeping "some money and papers" in the house since, she said, there is no bank in Madison. Mrs. Hinman described the missing papers as deeds, and that they would be of no use to the thieves. It only means I will have to go through the trouble of replacing them, she said.

Mrs. Hinman said she, her sister Mrs. Betty Armstrong, and a friend, Mrs. Rose Houlihan, of Oriskany Falls, had left the house on Route 20 for a drive Sunday at 1:30 and returned at 7:30 to find the money missing from the safe. She said the hinges of the five foot-high safe had been knocked off, apparently with a hammer, and the safe door was lying on the floor.

Senior Investigator C.E. Walburgh of the State police said yesterday there were no signs the home had been entered forcibly. Mrs. Hinman said police told her that entry was possibly made by the use of a skeleton key through the rear door.

A bartender at McCabe's Restaurant, directly across the street from the Hinman home, said he had held an "open house" between 2:30 and 6:00 Sunday afternoon. He said his place had been "filled" and that there was considerable activity and noise.

Mrs. Hinman said she thought noise from the "open house" might have served to distract passersby from anyone entering the house. Rt. 20 is the main thoroughfare running through the heart of Madison. State Police Investigator G.A. Sanders said at the scene of the theft that so far neighbors had indicated no sign of unusual activity at the Hinman home Sunday afternoon.

Mrs. Hinman said she owned an automobile garage in Madison and several farms which produce corn and oats. She said she was born and raised in Madison."

Madison – “A wealthy widow told State Police yesterday that she had no idea there was \$351,875 more in a small compartment within a 19th century safe that was burglarized of an estimated \$250,000 last Sunday. She said she had never tried to open the small inner safe.

Locksmiths opened the inner safe Wednesday night. Troopers spent the rest of the night counting the money, which was in wrappers. The denominations were mostly \$100 bills, some \$500 bills and the rest were in \$50 and \$20's, State Police said.

The “new” money, which was found behind a three-inch laminated steel door, was in a compartment about two feet deep, a foot and a half wide and about eight inches high. The money is now kept in a very secure place until it can be returned to Mrs. Hinman and subsequently placed in a bank vault. Captain John Miller of Troop D, in Oneida, said it had now been definitely established that the safe had contained more than \$600,000 -- \$250,000 the burglars lifted and \$351,875 found yesterday.

Investigators said that at least two persons were involved in the burglary, working what State Police claimed was a lengthy observation of the Hinman home and the daily routine of Mrs. Hinman.”

Utica Daily Press – August 23, 1963

ADDITIONAL ITEMS – As reported in the Utica Daily Press, the robbery was the largest ever reported in Central New York up to that time. Mrs. Hinman offered a reward not to exceed \$10,000, plus 5% of the recovered money. The money was never recovered; subsequently no reward was ever given.

OTHER FACTS – Many area residents were extensively questioned, especially former and current employees. No pertinent information was obtained from them.

The idea of an “inside job” was widely circulated for many years. Nothing was ever proven.

The case continues to be unsolved!!