



BILL GRANE/Monadnock Ledger Staff
These shoes, worn by William Kendrick Dean as he plunged lifeless to the bottom of a well in Jaffrey, are part of an exhibit at the Jaffrey Civic Center. More than 76 years later, the case still fascinates.

A long-lasting mystery

Civic Center exhibit tries to shed light on Dean murder

Aug. 13, 1918, was a typical late summer night. It was hot, moonlit, the air motionless, the crickets silent. It was the perfect night for a murder, Dr. William Kendrick Dean's, to be exact. He was a prominent, well-respected Jaffrey citizen.

Fifteen minutes after drinking a glass of milk and eating a couple of currant buns, Dean was bludgeoned with a three-pronged hand weeder in his barn, a mere 500 feet away from his house where his wife was getting ready for bed. A light horse blanket was wrapped around his head; his ankles, knees, and wrists were tied; and his body was dropped into a 12-foot well. A 27-pound rock, placed inside the grain sack pulled over his head and shoulders, made sure he stayed in submerged in the dank, dark water.

Seventy-six years later, his death is still a mystery. Nearly all the Jaffrey residents — and the various suspects — have since passed away. But like most unsolved crimes, especially those that occur in a place as peaceful and safe as Jaffrey, this one refuses to die.

Case in proof is the latest exhibit at the Jaffrey Civic Center. On display through Sept. 23, you can see the actual evidence presented during the Dean murder trial, held at the Keene Court House eight months after the murder.

Included are a piece of wood from the barn, splattered with blood; Dean's tattered rubber foam canvas shoes, black socks, and garters, which he was wearing when he was killed; and the white porcelain doorknobs that had been smudged with a bloody hand but didn't reveal fingerprints.

The weapons are also included: the horse blanket pulled over Dean's head to absorb the blood, the ropes he was tied up with, and the burlap bag tied over the blanket which held the rock used to weigh him down in the cistern.

The evidence was given to the Jaffrey Historical Society by the Keene Courthouse early this summer, thanks to the effort of Margaret Bean, a Jaffrey resident who you might say is the local expert on the Dean murder.

Bean's father-in-law, D.D. Bean, and Dr. Frederick Sweeney were both interested parties during the Dean murder trial. Sometime later, Sweeney's son, Bud, received a letter from Stillman Rogers, clerk of the Superior Court in Keene.

Rogers said that in rebuilding and expanding the courthouse, they had come across a brown paper package containing 20 notebooks in Pittman shorthand, the recording of the Dean murder grand jury inquest. They asked if he was interested in them.

Knowing of her interest in the case, Sweeney informed Bean. By coincidence, Bean had learned

Pittman shorthand, an obscure form long since overshadowed by the more popular Gregg, while working on Wall Street. With Sweeney's permission, she went to the courthouse and was given official permission to transcribe the notebooks two at a time.

Bean spent six years transcribing, an arduous task because there were many passages she was unable to translate.

During that time, Bean was vacationing in Jamaica when she read about Samuel Fitz-Henley, a Pittman expert who had just been paid thousand of dollars to transcribe the notes of a reporter who had died. Bean met with him, and he told her that Pittman shorthand had changed over time, then showed her a teaching manual and shorthand dictionary from the early 1900s, pointing out the differences.

Armed with this new knowledge, Bean returned home to finish the transcription, which she eventually published in a book, *Hearing by the Grand Jury on the Death of W. K. Dean, April 11-22, 1919, Courthouse, Keene*.

Meanwhile, Bean had developed a friendly relationship with Rogers, clerk of the court. He told her about the box of evidence. Twice Bean arranged to borrow the evidence so that history teacher Dennis Wright could present it to his middle-school students.

That got Bean thinking about having the items kept at the Jaffrey Historical Society. Last year, Bean asked Martha Crocker, a friend and Peterborough judge, to write a letter to the Keene court. Early this summer, they turned it over to the historical society.

Poring over these artifacts could lead one to create some new conclusions to this who-done-it, although it's highly unlikely.

Immediately after the murder, there were four prime suspects and motives: Mrs. Dean, who could have murdered her husband in a fit of jealousy; Lawrence Colfelt of New York, a mysterious stranger who wintered in Dean's large house, rumored to be a German spy.

This theory was strengthened by the fact that shortly before Dean's murder, Dean had asked him to move out; intoxicated hoodlums caught in Dean's barn; Charles Rich, town moderator, choir director, cashier of the Monadnock Bank, and district judge.

The prime suspect, Rich had a mysterious black eye the day after the murder.

He claimed his horse had kicked him; others believed he was lying. The town, already caught up in World War I hysteria, was torn between those who sided with Rich and those who called him a cold-hearted killer.

Nothing was ever proven, and Rich ended up winning a libel suit against the *Boston American* newspaper. But that didn't change what people thought. Today, the mystery goes on.

Bean said, "I still have people tell me in confidence that they know who did it, but they all say someone different."

A LOOK BACK



Kelly Stimmell