

Dublin Historical Society

DUBLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03444 • FOUNDED 1920

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TWO DEGREES OF SEPARATION: DUBLIN AND THE MURDER OF STANFORD WHITE

Augusta Petrone has a childhood memory of her mother Molly Henderson pointing up a driveway off the Lake Road. She spoke of a widow who had connections to a murder, but didn't elaborate the details. That murder had occurred not in Dublin but in New York City some 40 years before. The murder of Stanford White, the famous architect and designer, by a jealous husband in 1906 was termed by the press as the "murder of the century" even though the 20th century had barely begun.



Front page news, June 26, 1906

THE CONNECTION

The driveway mentioned above led to the house known as Lone Tree Hill, now Tiadnock. Built for her children Henry Copley and Belle Greene in 1900 by Mary Abby Greene, it was constructed on a portion of the 100 plus acres of land which she purchased in 1882, the land which became the nucleus of the summer colony. Famously, Mark Twain rented this house in the summer of 1905, the first of two summers he spent in Dublin.

By 1935 Jane Thaw owned the house. Nee Jane Olmsted she was an accomplished concert pianist who married Edward Thaw in April of 1906. What was Jane Thaw's connection to the murder? Her husband was the younger brother of Harry Kendall Thaw, the man who murdered Stanford White. Their father William Thaw was an early investor in the Pennsylvania

2020 MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Please use the enclosed envelope to send us your membership dues for 2020. Dues and additional contributions cover the majority of our operating expenses. We appreciate your support for the Archives and the 1841 Schoolhouse Museum in their roles preserving Dublin's history.

Railroad and became a tremendously wealthy shareholder. That wealth is demonstrated in the 1930 census: the widowed Jane Thaw owned a house in Milton, MA valued at \$150,000, fifty times the value of other dwellings on the page.

THE MURDER

Newspapers reported that on June 25, 1906 Harry K. Thaw, his wife Evelyn Nesbit, and two male friends attended a performance at the Rooftop Garden at Madison Square Garden. Stanford White, arriving late, took a seat at his cafe-style table and ironically, as the song "I Could Love a Million Girls" was performed, Thaw walked within 2 feet of White and shot him 3 times, twice in the head, in front of hundreds of witnesses. Thaw was heard to say, "You ruined my wife.", while addressing White's body. Nesbit, thinking her husband was behind her, was waiting for the elevator when the shots rang out.

WHO WAS EVELYN NESBIT

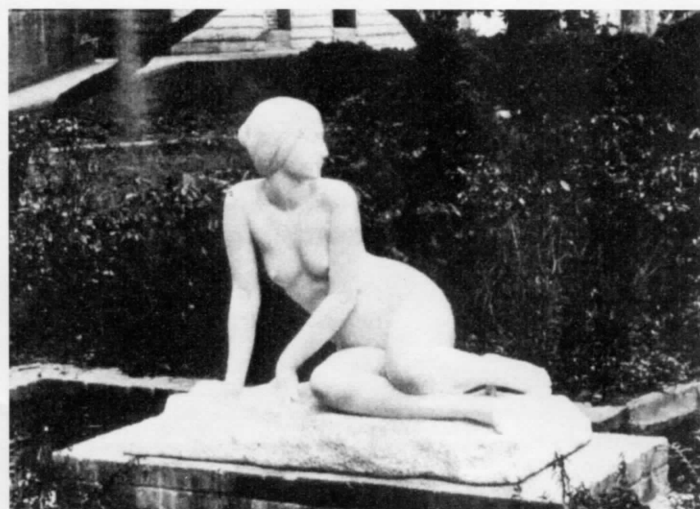
The woman at the center of the scandal was Florence Evelyn Nesbit. She came to New York from Philadelphia with her mother and brother in 1900. Her mother's hopes of a making a better living as a seamstress in NYC didn't materialize, so Florence started modelling in her early teens to help support the family. First, she worked as a studio model for painters and sculptors.



Credit: Wikiwand.

Evelyn Nesbit circa 1902.
Innocence, maybe not!
Google and Pinterest have many images of her, some more chaste than others.

In fact her modelling at the Art Students League brings a second Dublin connection. George Grey Barnard served as Instructor of Sculpture there from 1901 to 1904, successor to Augustus St. Gaudens. It is known that Nesbit was the model for Barnard's 1902 life-size, marble sculpture entitled *Innocence* or *Maidenhood*. Presumably, he met Nesbit through the Art Students League. His Dublin connection dates back to 1896 when he married Edna Monroe at Cathedral Rock. Barnard's studio on her parents' property, located on the west side of Beech Hill, served as studios for Barnard. It is possible, but unlikely, that Nesbit ever posed in Dublin.



Maidenhood or Innocence by George Grey Barnard. Model was Evelyn Nesbit in 1902. This sculpture is presently at Anna Hyatt Huntington's Brookgreen Gardens near Myrtle Beach, S.C.. Brookgreen dates the piece to 1896, but Evelyn would have been twelve years old. I think you'll agree that this figure is more mature than a 12 year old, so fits the 1902 date better.



The second Madison Square Garden. Built in 1890 and demolished in 1925. The sculpture atop the tower is "Diana" by Augustus St. Gaudens.

Like Marilyn Monroe Nesbit was extremely photogenic. She modeled in commercial advertising, becoming the “face” of various products. Her picture appeared in magazines like Scribner’s and Harper’s. Even Charles Dana Gibson, the creator of the “Gibson Girl” concept of ideal feminine beauty, drew her image. Tiring of the long hours posing for artists, in 1901 she turned to the stage for a new career and changed her name to Evelyn.

STANFORD WHITE

Stanford White enjoyed the status of being a reknown architect, a partner in the firm of McKim, Mead & White. In 1888 the design of the second Madison Square Garden was one of White’s first commissions with the firm best known for Shingle Style houses and grand public buildings. It was built on the site of a former railroad depot once rented by P T Barnum at 26th Street and Madison Avenue.¹

White, who was known for pursuing relationships with young girls, asked to meet Evelyn Nesbit after seeing her photograph in 1901, when he was near fifty and she only 16. Commencing as a paternal relationship with the countenance of her mother, Nesbit would visit White in his second townhouse. (He also shared a large estate on Long Island and a residence in the city with his wife and son.) He and Nesbit often spent time together there in his studio where she would swing on a red velvet swing while he worked. The relationship became more than platonic, and they saw each other for nearly a year.

HARRY KENDALL THAW

Harry Thaw who had inherited forty million dollars² on his father’s death in 1889 came to New York around 1900 with a reputation, “Not just a playboy who spent extravagant sums of money, he also dabbled in cocaine and heroin, and beat prostitutes with a whip.”³

Thaw, who claimed to have seen Nesbit perform in the show “The Wild Rose” forty times,⁴ pursued Nesbit for over 4 years, before she consented to marry him in 1905. Before accepting his proposal of marriage she admitted to Thaw that White had raped her four years before when she was unconscious. This admission stoked his already zealous obsession about chastity and his vendetta with Stanford White intensified. During the year after his marriage to Nesbit Thaw employed multiple private detectives to follow White, and White fearing for his life followed suit. His hired protection did not shield White from the bullets of Thaw’s concealed weapon.

To make a long story short, Thaw’s two trials were sensational, as much a trial of Nesbit and White as it

was of Thaw. It’s purported that Thaw’s mother spent millions of dollars on his defense. The investment must have helped, for his first trial ended in a hung jury and his subsequent trial found him not guilty due to temporary insanity. Thaw was in mental institutions until 1925. Upon his release he showed no remorse for White’s murder.

After the trials Nesbit worked in vaudeville productions and divorced Thaw in 1916. Nesbit would go on to act in 10 silent films between 1914 and 1922 until problems with addiction ruined her career.⁵ Surviving an suicide attempt in 1924, she owned a tearoom and eventually managed several hotels in Miami before moving to California and becoming a sculptor.

Interest in revisiting the scandal has been long lived. In 1955 the movie *The Girl in the Red Velvet*

Swing starring Joan Collins, Farley Granger and Ray Milland was made with Evelyn Nesbit’s endorsement. In 2008 Paula Uruburu published *American Eve: Evelyn Nesbit, Stanford White, The Birth of the “It” Girl and the Crime of the Century*. The most recent publication by Simon Baatz is entitled *The Girl on the Velvet Swing: Sex, Murder, and Madness at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*, Mullholland Books, 2018.

Looking at the scandal with today’s lens, the story starts with a famous, wealthy, entitled man sexually assaulting a young girl. It is the same scenario that so many women in the #MeToo movement have experienced. As for whether Harry Thaw was guilty of pre-meditated murder, much hinged on Evelyn Nesbit’s testimony about her relationship with Stanford White, including the details of her rape. That the jury of twelve men in the first trial couldn’t agree on a murder conviction for Thaw, given the evidence, is curious. A factor, no doubt, was an ability to shift blame for Thaw’s jealousy to the reputation of his high-profile wife.

Written by Lisa Foote

¹ Keith York City Blog Murder at Madison Square Garden: Evelyn Nesbit, Stanford White and Harry Kendall Thaw Made headlines in 1906, January 17, 2013

² The Register Danville, VA, Nesbit Obituary, January 19, 1967

³ NY Post Zachary Kussin, Jan 8, 2019 Child ‘rape’, drugs, a brazen murder: Inside the Gilded Age’s “Crime of the Century”

⁴ Keith York City Blog, op. cit.

⁵ The Register, op. cit.

SAVE THE DATE

POTLUCK

MARCH 20, 2020

6-8 P.M.

DUBLIN COMMUNITY CHURCH

THE SCHOOLHOUSE MUSEUM HEARSES ON THE MOVE

On September 12th, The Dublin Historical Society relocated our two hearses from the inside of the 1841 Schoolhouse Museum to the shed behind the building. Sterling Abram first undertook the task of repairing the shed, which was necessary in order for it to safely house the hearses. In addition to moving the shed, Sterling replaced much of the structure and added windows and a new door to the shed. The move required that the back wall of the schoolhouse be temporarily dismantled, which was also done by Sterling. The Dublin Historical Society would like to thank all who lent a hand in moving the hearses: Hank Campbell, Rusty Bastedo, Brian Barden, Sterling Abram, Jeff Clough, Peter Kenyon and Denny Monaghan.

This was not the first time the hearses had been moved through a wall in the schoolhouse. The wheeled hearse and the winter hearse (which has sleigh runners) were purchased by the town in 1872 and 1873, respectively. They were stored in the hearse house at the cemetery long after their use was discontinued due to the introduction of the automobile. In 1963,



the fire engines were moved from the basement of the Dublin Town Hall to the new fire station and the hearses were relocated to the vacated space. When the town loaned the hearses to DHS in 1983, they were moved to the Schoolhouse Museum, which necessitated that the wall be taken down for the first time. The hearses remained inside the schoolhouse for the next 36 years, with the town transferring ownership to DHS in 1994.

Once the hearses were relocated, a team of volunteers assembled to clean and organize the schoolhouse. Nancy Campbell, Lucy Shonk, Judy

Knapp, Laura Elcoate, Ruthie Gammons and Sharon Monaghan all stepped in to clean and sort through the contents of the museum. They examined and took note of the condition of items, photographed them and accessioned items that had not yet been added to our database. A special thank you to Paul Hardy for cleaning the wood floors after the space had been cleared.

With the 100th anniversary of the Dublin Historical Society being celebrated in 2020, the relocation of the hearses opens up much needed space for future exhibits and events. Stay tuned for announcements about this year's upcoming events!

NOTE CARD FUNDRAISER

Boxes of 10 note cards with color reproductions of 5 Abbott Thayer paintings are available for \$10.00 per box. Please fill out the enclosed order form, compute the shipping costs and return it in the dues envelope. Feel free to write one check for both dues and cards.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

SATURDAY, AUGUST 8, 2020
1 PM - 3 PM
SCHOOLHOUSE MUSEUM

IN MEMORIAM

The society reports with great sorrow the recent loss of

Elmer Harry Close

We extend our condolences to the family

Dublin Historical Society

P O Box 415 | Dublin, NH 03444

dublinhistory@townofdublin.org

Office: 8 Church Street - 603-563-8545
1841 Schoolhouse Museum: 1179 Main Street

TRUSTEES

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