

Park House Murder 1914

By Brenda Seekins 2017

Freelance Writer & Hartland Historical Society Member

A “domestic dispute” appears to be the cause of a 1914 murder in Hartland. The scene was the Park House Hotel on Main Street. The hotel would be sold soon after to Harry Randlett and begin operating as the Hartland Hardware Store. Many locals will remember the large building in its later years as the Hartland Emporium before it was razed and the current Moose Lake Market built at the location.

“One more tragedy, the cause of which may be traced to the Eternal Feminine” was part of the lead in the September 28, 1914 front page story in the Bangor Daily Commercial (a newspaper published until 1949).

It all began when George A. Hubbard of Oakland traveled to Hartland in an effort to bring his wife home from working at the hotel. It seems Mrs. Cora Bates Hubbard was in Hartland helping her brother-in-law, LaForest D. Mathews, hotel proprietor, after her sister, Mrs. Mathews, died five weeks earlier. Apparently Mrs. Hubbard was not too keen on returning home and her refusal apparently didn't please her husband, prompting him ultimately to shoot his brother-in-law, Mr. Mathews, as “revolver bullets whistled” past the woman standing a few feet away.

According to the news report, Hubbard was arrested shortly after the shooting and eventually arraigned on a charge of murder. With his guilty plea, he was taken to Skowhegan and locked up in the Somerset county jail without bail to await the action of the grand jury. He reportedly told Sheriff Frank Thompson as he was entering the jail, “I am not so bad as I look, I could not help it. I was driven to it.”

The news story provided graphic detail to the event and did little to dispute Hubbard's guilt. It was about 1pm on Sunday, September 27, according to Minot Bigelow, a hotel clerk, when he heard a succession of loud noises. Bigelow thought chairs were being overturned. But when he ran upstairs to Mathews' living quarters he “broke in” to see Mathews “huddled on the floor with his back against the wall.” The man apparently was still alive, but died within a few minutes. Two bullets passed through his chest, according to the report, although each shot “would have alone proved fatal.” A third bullet apparently entered his leg. The weapon was identified as a .38 caliber revolver, a “five-chambered weapon,” with four cartridges fired.

Hubbard reportedly made no attempt to flee and was soon taken into custody by Deputy Sheriff Fred S. Burrill. Coroner Clyde E. Martin was summoned from nearby Pittsfield to conduct an inquest. The jurors identified in the report included George M. Lancey, D. A. Packard, Allen R. Burton, Willard D. Burton, E. A. Webster and John F. Connelly. Minot Bigelow, Mrs. Hubbard and Dr. Lynne H. Blanchard testified.

Mrs. Hubbard described by the news report as “in a very nervous condition” made a statement to the officers. She said that “she had remained in Hartland after her sister's funeral because her husband had not provided properly for her at their home in Oakland. She also stated that Hubbard had threatened her as he began firing but he did not shoot at or strike her. She said that Mathews fell at the first shot and that he said nothing becoming unconscious immediately.”

“The jury returned a verdict declaring that Mathews came to his death by bullet wounds caused by a revolver in the hands of George A. Hubbard.” Hubbard’s guilty plea shortened the proceeding some and he was quickly en route to Skowhegan.

But...there’s more to the story.

It seems Hubbard actually arrived at the Park House Hotel the evening before, and apparently had visited there a few weeks before in his attempt to bring his wife home, according to another report. This marriage apparently was Hubbard’s third, and the Bangor Daily Commercial report also listed his previous marriages, his divorce in the first and the death of a second wife, his surviving children, his work history and allegations of Hubbard’s being a “hard drinker.” Three children survived him, although none were the result of his last marriage. His two daughters commented to the newspaper on the allegations of murder and their opinion of their father’s mindset at the time. One daughter said her father had a “weakness of drink” and did not have a happy marriage. A son-in-law told the newspaper, Hubbard became “mentally deranged from brooding over his troubles,” being separated from his wife. He also said Hubbard had not consumed any liquor since the 4th of July.

Other newspapers in that era also reported on the event with the Lewiston Evening Journal indicating that Hubbard visited the hotel sometime before with the same plan, to bring his wife home. At his February 1915 trial, Hubbard testified, “that his wife went from Oakland in August to attend the funeral of Mrs. Mathews, a sister of Mrs. Hubbard. She stayed after that to work for Mathews in the hotel. He had tried, he said, to get his wife to come home. He went to Mathews and asked him to get her to go home, Mathews had said, he testified, “No I am going to keep her as long as she will stay.” With Hubbard reporting, “I said to him, there is a law against a man doing that.” Mathews reportedly replied, “You may have all the law you want and anything else.” Hubbard said of the incident, “Then (he) pumped (sic) up and went to a bureau drawer, as if to take out something, and I got out.”

Retelling his version of the shooting, according to the Lewiston paper, Hubbard said, “My wife and I were in Mathew’s room, Mathews had been drinking. He offered me a drink. I thought he wanted to drug me and I refused. He then grabbed me by my coat, over the chest. I caught him by his collar. He gave me another shove; I poked him over in a corner near the bed. He ran his left hand under a pillow. I thought he was after something to do my up (sic) and I then pulled the revolver from my hip pocket and fired. I don’t remember anything I said after that.”

The news report also said Hubbard denied that he had said he would have been satisfied if he had shot his wife, too, as the State contended. Under cross-examination, Hubbard told Attorney General Pattangall, “I took the revolver to Hartland with me because I remembered the incident of Mathews going to the bureau drawer when I asked him a few weeks before to ask my wife to come home with me.”

The ages of the parties involved are confusing within the news reports, but it appears both men were in their sixties; Hubbard, 66 and Mathews, 64. The Bangor Daily Commercial reported Hubbard was employed nearly 20 years by Emerson & Stevens, scythe and axe manufacturers, of Oakland. For 15 years he was foreman of the scythe department. “He was considered a competent worker at this trade.

Neighbors and acquaintances of Hubbard in Oakland speak of him as an honest, upright citizen. The man, however, is said to have been at times a hard drinker.”

LaForest D. Mathews was the proprietor of the Park House Hotel for several years, coming from Brighton where he was “in the business of manufacturing shooks (*a set of staves and headings for one hogshead, cask or barrel*) and lumber” and was well liked. (*Note: A few local people may know of a LaForest Mathews of Pittsfield, but we were assured he has no known relationship to the victim of this murder, and the name appears to be coincidental.*)

In February of 1915, a jury deliberated just four hours and returned a guilty verdict against George A. Hubbard. He was sentenced to hard labor for the rest of his life at the State Prison in Thomaston.