

**DAVID BUSHMAN
& MARK T. GIVENS**

FOREWORD BY MARK FROST, CO-CREATOR OF TWIN PEAKS

MURDER

AT

TEAL'S

POND

HAZEL DREW and the MYSTERY that INSPIRED TWIN PEAKS

MURDER
AT
TEAL'S
POND

OTHER TITLES BY DAVID BUSHMAN

Conversations with Mark Frost: Twin Peaks, Hill Street Blues, and the Education of a Writer

Twin Peaks FAQ: All That's Left to Know About a Place Both Wonderful and Strange

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MURDER

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 **THOMAS & MERCER**

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For Betty Calhoun, storyteller.

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FOREWORD

What's the first "ghost story" you remember? One that left marks, if not scars. That gripped you with the singular chill of mortality introducing itself.

Mine came by way of my maternal grandmother—one for whom the words *colorful* and *strange* don't begin to do justice—a more than apt stand-in for the archetype of the crone, one of mythology's eternal guides to the underworld. The former head of the WPA's music division and a charter member of the OSS in London during WWII, Betty Lawson Calhoun was brilliant, complicated, and an inveterate fabulist.

Her family were city folks, her father an accomplished engineer and professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, a then-thriving industrial hub just upriver from Albany. When the Spanish flu pandemic devastated the country in 1918, Thomas Lawson decided to move his wife and two young daughters to the country. On a rustic, rugged, heavily wooded plateau twenty miles to the southeast, near the shores of an idyllic, arrowheaded alpine lake, he bought a decaying eighteenth-century farmhouse. He transformed it into a substantial ten-room home, bought up most of the raw acreage around the shoreline, built roads and a windmill, selling lots or cabins to friends and colleagues, soon creating a lively, upper-middle-class summer retreat community.

Life for the fortunate families on the shores of that lake changed forever and for good. For the mountain folk surrounding them, who'd been living in isolation on that plateau for seven generations, little changed. They worked for the newcomers but kept their distance, eking out a hardscrabble living from the land, logging, making charcoal and, during Prohibition, moonshine. Two different worlds.

Legends abounded. These mountain families, nine of them in particular, were said to be descendants of Hessian mercenaries, deserters from the British Army during the American Revolution, drawn to this area

for its resemblance to their ancestral Black Forest. The one the Brothers Grimm made famous as the source of all that's sinister. A more local talent, Washington Irving, captured the same eerie mood of these Upstate woods, hills, and ponds, where the indifferent savagery of nature infected those who dared intrude and try to tame it. Whenever thunder rattled the panes, Betty always referenced the local lore; it was the sound of Rip van Winkle's eerie Dutchmen, bowling ninepins in their mountain lair.

When we were youngsters, the locals were presented to us as peasants out of Russian literature: colorful, dim, loyal, with an edge of uncivilized danger. A more prosaic explanation, learned later, is that two centuries of deprivation, ignorance, intermarriage, alcoholism, madness, and incest yielded little but pain and tragedy. We heard constant whispers of terrible things that happened "up the mountain" and met many of these folks throughout childhood. A few chilled me to the bone; let's just say, when I later saw the movie, the locals in *Deliverance* seemed familiar to me.

So, to Betty's ghost story: two local laborers, hill folk, staggering back up the mountain after a payday pub crawl in town—a weekly ritual—encounter something uncanny.

Full moon. Clear, still night, early fall, with a whisper of winter in the air. As the men approach a small cow pond on the right, a desperate, loud, lowing moan fills them with fear. And then, hovering above the water in the moonlight, a glowing apparition that in their pickled minds assumes the shape of a struggling human form. The two drunks sprint home in terror, instantly sober, pledging to reform their ways.

Our eyes were like saucers. We drove by that cow pond every day on our way up and down the mountain. Haunted? Damn.

And then, with a cackle, Betty revealed that the next day a nearby farmer discovered one of his Guernseys had wandered off and gotten stuck in the shallows.

So I ask, innocently, why did they think it was a ghost in the first place?

Oh. Ten years earlier the body of a young woman, a murder victim, had been found floating in that pond. Betty offers this as a throwaway, a punch line, the end.

I didn't take it that way. A real person died in that water. She never mentioned a name and, when pressed, remembered no details. As time passed, without knowing a single fact about this young woman—or if this story was entirely invented—the image of that poor, forgotten soul lodged in a corner of my mind.

Two years later in California, that feeling hit much closer to my life. While away at boarding school in Canada, a girl I knew well—Susan Freschi, fourteen, daughter of my father's boss and sister to one of my best friends—was assaulted and killed by a deranged young man. As time passed, and I learned more about the pervasive threat of sexual violence that women face on an everyday basis, these two dreadful events coalesced in my mind.

Twenty-five years later these conflated memories found fictional life as Laura Palmer. Or rather, Laura Palmer became a way to explore and explain what might have happened to that lost girl in the pond.

After *Twin Peaks* went off the air, I bought a place on that lake myself and began spending summers there for the first time in decades. It turned out a fellow I'd known since childhood, John Walsh, a local jack-of-all-trades and one of the hill folk—his grandfather had worked for my great-grandfather and Betty—had been equally obsessed with this story and for years had been digging to learn more.

She was real. She had a name. Twenty-year-old Hazel Drew—beautiful, blonde, and connected to a number of powerful men—died in that pond one hot July night in 1908. She was a local girl who'd moved to the city, encountered a new way of life, and got caught up in the fast lane. Her story became a regional and then a national scandal. Even Betty's tall tale of the two drunks, ten years later, mistaking a lost calf for Hazel's ghost, turned out to be true.

David Bushman, a *Variety* editor when we first met in the nineties, emailed me a few years ago. He'd caught wind of this story—I'd made a passing reference to it in an interview—and he and his writing partner, Mark Givens, wanted to dig in and investigate. I offered my blessings and a few leads to follow, including my old childhood friend from up the mountain.

What they've produced here is a meticulous reconstruction of a sensational, forgotten crime, the investigation that followed, and its aftermath on the Capital region—over a century later—all rendered as

gripping and immediate as an episode of *Law and Order: SVU*. It is also a relentless search for answers and justice, not only for Hazel Drew but for all the women who continue to fall victim to this monstrous plague of violence. It is, we now know, a crime as old as time.

I think of her whenever I pass Teal's Pond. The ripples this murder created in that still water have continued to radiate around the world for a hundred years. For all of our Hazels and Susans and Lauras, this book is a monument of remembrance to their lost and stolen lives.

Mark Frost, cocreator of *Twin Peaks*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Victim

Hazel Irene Drew: twenty-year-old Troy woman whose body is found floating in Teal's Pond on July 11, 1908

The Detectives

Duncan C. Kaye: Rensselaer County detective and the district attorney's right-hand man; Republican foot soldier and alleged sympathizer of the anti-Catholic American Protective Association

John W. Lawrenson: Troy police detective assigned to the case

John H. Murnane: Rensselaer County detective who was partnered with Lawrenson and focused on Troy

Jarvis P. O'Brien: Rensselaer County district attorney, in charge of the investigation; Republican Party stalwart

William P. Powers: Rensselaer County detective who focused on Sand Lake; also active in the Republican Party

Louis Unser: Troy police detective who worked the countryside with Powers

The Doctors

Dr. Elias B. Boyce: Sand Lake local who was first doctor on the scene; helped with the autopsy, and insisted Hazel was strangled

Dr. Harry O. Fairweather: Troy doctor who assisted in autopsy; vocal opponent of strangulation theory

Dr. Elmer E. Reichard: Sand Lake physician who assisted in autopsy

Morris H. Strobe: Rensselaer County coroner

The Family

John Drew: Hazel's father; heavy drinker who couldn't hold a steady job

Joseph H. Drew: Hazel's older brother

Julia A. Drew: Hazel's mother, disabled by a childhood bout with polio; reporters remarked on her cold demeanor and strange behavior, including consulting a psychic during the investigation

William "Willie" M. Drew: Hazel's younger brother

Eva Lapp Drew: Hazel's sister-in-law (married to Joseph Drew) and confidant

Minnie Taylor: Hazel's maternal aunt and possibly her closest confidant; a quirky woman who, detectives were convinced, knew more than she was sharing

William Taylor: Hazel's maternal uncle and owner of a farm near Teal's Pond; a sullen man whose eccentricities and apparent indifference to his niece's death befuddled investigators

The Employers

Edward R. and Mary L. Cary: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute professor and Troy city engineer, and his wife; Hazel's final employers

Thomas W. and Nellie M. Hislop: former city treasurer of Troy and his wife—Hazel's first employers; Thomas's political career was tarnished by a financial scandal that was brewing while Hazel worked for him

John H. and Adelaide Tupper: wealthy coal merchant and his wife; Hazel's second employers

The Friends

Amelia Huntley: Hazel's Watervliet friend who, according to one report, claimed to have seen her on July 6

Mina and Frank Jones: Mina was one of Hazel's closest friends; the Joneses moved from Troy to Providence and then to Maine

Sarah Moran: a Watervliet friend who said she did not see Hazel on July 6

Ida Rowe: another Watervliet friend who said she did not see Hazel on July 6

Carrie A. Weaver: one of Hazel's closest friends, who worked as a domestic servant for the Greenes, friends of the Carys

The Country

John Abel: liveryman who claimed to have driven Hazel to William Taylor's farm in the spring, despite Taylor's denial

Mabel Brown: Crooked Lake hotelier who told of being visited by women from the Alps camp

Peter Cipperly: farmer who reported seeing a woman resembling Hazel on an Averill Park-bound trolley on July 7

Minnie Clifford: former caretaker at Alps camp who reported hearing a scream coming from the camp on either the night of the murder or the night before

Christopher Crape: Averill Park hotelier who reported a strange automobile in the vicinity of Teal's Pond on what may have been the night of the murder

Lawrence Gruber: teenage camper who discovered Hazel's body

Rudolph Gundrum: Taborton charcoal burner who was one of the last people to see Hazel Drew alive on Taborton Road the evening of July 7

William and Elizabeth Hoffay: Taborton farmers who reported seeing two men and a wagon on Taborton Road on July 7

Aurilla E. Horton: Averill Park woman who believed she saw Hazel walking at the bottom of Taborton Mountain on evening of July 6

Alexander and Henry E. Kramrath: Albany brothers who owned the Alps camp, reportedly the site of wild sex parties

Willis D. Larkin: proprietor of Larkin Brothers Funeral Home in Sand Lake, where Hazel's autopsy was conducted

Ebenezer Martin: Sand Lake justice of the peace who was one of the first officials at the scene of the crime

Gilbert Miller: Taborton resident who notified authorities of the body's discovery

Charles Rankie: Taborton farmer who claimed to have seen a man at the pond on recent Sundays matching description provided by the Hoffays

Frank and Frederika Richmond: William Taylor's farmhands, who lived at the Taylor farm but could not provide him with an alibi. Note: Frederika's name was spelled various ways in contemporaneous newspaper reports.

Henry and Charlotte Rollman: Taborton residents who reported seeing Hazel Drew on Taborton Road on July 7

Julia and Henry Rymiller: Taborton residents who drove on Taborton Road on July 7 but didn't see Hazel

Frank Smith: young Taborton farmhand said to be infatuated with Hazel; dismissed by neighbors as a "half-wit," he was one of the last people to see Hazel alive; his antics and inconsistent testimony during the investigation infuriated detectives

John Smith: Frank Smith's father, who informed William Taylor that the body in the pond was likely Hazel

Libbie Sowalskie: Taborton farmer with whom Willie Drew was boarding at the time of the murder

Tom Sowalskie: Libbie's hulking son, rumored to have violent tendencies that included torturing animals

Conrad "Coon" Teal: Taborton farmer who owned the pond in which Hazel's body was found

George White: camper from Averill Park who helped retrieve the body from the pond

Marie Yeabauer: Taborton resident who drove on Taborton Road on July 7 but didn't see Hazel. Note: Yeabauer was spelled various ways in contemporaneous newspaper reports.

The City

Adelbert Atwood: parcel clerk at Union Station in Troy who would play an innocent but crucial role in the investigation

William and Florence Barker: cuff-and-collar manufacturer and his wife who lived across from the Carys on Whitman Court

Thomas Carey: Troy fireman who saw Hazel walking on the street on July 7

William Cushing: Troy bartender and Republican county committeeman who admitted to driving a rig out to Sand Lake on July 7 but claimed he wasn't near Teal's Pond

Lawrence Eagan: grocery store employee who first said he saw Hazel on July 6, then said he wasn't sure

Arthur and Mary Greene: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute professor and his wife; employers of Hazel's friend Carrie Weaver

George B. Harrison: wealthy businessman and employer of Hazel's aunt Minnie Taylor

Edward J. Knauff: Hazel's onetime dentist

Anna LaBelle: sales clerk at Frear's department store who knew Hazel—exactly how well became a matter of some dispute

Samuel LeRoy: Troy train conductor suspected of involvement in the murder

John E. Magner: train conductor suspected of meeting with Hazel at Union Station

Jeanette Marcellus: Hazel's friend who saw her at Union Station on July 6

Henrietta Robertson: mother of Hazel's friend Lillian; saw Hazel at Union Station on July 6

Fred W. Schatzle: Troy embalmer who helped his friend William Cushing rent a rig on July 7

Mary Schumaker: Hazel's seamstress

William Shyne: proprietor of Shyne's Horse Mart, a Troy livery that played a key role in the investigation into Hazel's death

The Admirers

Harry (last name unknown): author of a letter to Hazel signed "Knight of the Napp Kinn and Your Artist Friend," in which he apologized for possibly bruising her wrists

William C. Hogardt: Dedham, Massachusetts, man who called Hazel "one of his most intimate friends"

Edward Lavoie: former sweetheart of Hazel; detectives found a news clipping about him in Hazel's possessions

F. W. Schlafflin: meat-packer who met Hazel three years earlier and whose photo was found among her possessions

The Press

William M. Clemens: reporter/"criminologist" who covered the investigation into Hazel's murder for the *World*, annoying detectives and his peers in the press with his unsubstantiated and sensational reports

Louis H. Howe and John Kelly: reporters who found Hazel's glasses

Harold D. Neach: *Troy Standard* journalist who was said to be a passenger in a car that zoomed past Crape's Hotel on its way up Taborton Mountain

INTRODUCTION

So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist.

—Epicurus

Welcome to the town of Sand Lake, New York, population 8,425: a beatific, pastoral town nestled in the south-central corner of Rensselaer County, about thirteen miles east of Albany, the state capital. On the town's outskirts, deep within the woody terrain, lies the neighborhood of Taborton, named after Mount Tabor in Lower Galilee, Israel, which is where, according to the New Testament, the transfiguration of Jesus occurred; he radiated with light and conversed with the great prophets Moses and Elijah.

Taborton Road, the main route in and out, twists and turns for eight and a half miles from the bottom of Taborton Mountain, at the so-called Four Corners of Sand Lake, up past the Kipple (a variation of the German word *gipfel*, meaning “summit,” about 1,850 feet above sea level), past Big and Little Bowman Ponds, and, finally, on to the eastern tip of the mountain, where you arrive at a crossroads: turn left and you're bound for East Poestenkill or Berlin; turn right and your destination is Cherry Plain.

It's a lonely stretch of woods with acres and acres of trees, vegetation, and wildlife—you can walk for miles without ever encountering another person.

A lonely stretch of *haunted* woods, some might say. Folklorist Harold W. Thompson wrote in *Body, Boots & Britches: Folktales, Ballads and Speech from Country New York* of a Taborton farmer who had encountered a series of curious incidents in his barn: the tail and mane of one of his horses had been inexplicably braided; and the animal was so fatigued that the farmer was convinced someone had taken it out driving all night. Late at

night, he checked in on the horse and discovered a strange black cat perched upon its back. Determined to frighten the cat away, he stabbed the feline in the back with a three-tined pitchfork. The following morning, the farmer's mother—rumored by many in the woods to be a witch—was so ill that she was unable to rise from bed, but then the horse's braiding abruptly unraveled, and the animal regained its vigor. Three days later, a doctor, examining the farmer's mother, discovered three deep wounds in her back.

This sometimes charming, sometimes eerie little town is where Hazel Drew perished, and where our journey began.

Technically, our journey began in 2013 at a retrospective tribute to the television series *Twin Peaks* at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Mark Frost, who cocreated the show with David Lynch, commented that his own inspiration for the series—although not Lynch's—was an unsolved murder from the early 1900s in Upstate New York, where he and his family would spend summers at the home of his maternal grandmother, Betty Calhoun. Betty would regale Mark and his brother, Scott (who also wrote for *Twin Peaks* and is the author of the companion book *The Autobiography of F.B.I. Special Agent Dale Cooper: My Life, My Tapes*), with stories, many of them embellished—if not outright fabricated—including one about the murder of a young woman in the woods around the turn of the twentieth century that had never been solved. According to Betty, the ghost of the victim, whose body was discovered in a pond, still lingered in the woods, waiting for her slayer to be publicly exposed.

As Mark would later recall: “She would tell us all sorts of fantastic stories about life on the mountain, and one that really caught my ear was when she was a young girl she'd been told a story, something along the lines of a guy who had gone down to a tavern, kind of gotten a toot on, and was walking his way back up the mountain late at night, and he heard what he thought were the moans of a ghost. He saw something white flashing in the moonlight and scuttled home in terror.”

Mark couldn't be sure, but he believed the woman's name was Hazel Grey.

We have both long been obsessed with *Twin Peaks*. One of us (Mark) hosts a podcast about it, titled *Deer Meadow Radio* (<https://deermeadowradio.libsyn.com>); the other (David) has authored articles, essays, and books about it. We both also love a good mystery.

We were going to solve the murder of Hazel Grey!

Except there was no Hazel Grey. And “Upstate New York” wasn’t much of a clue (or *clue*, as it was spelled back then).

There was, however, a Hazel *Drew*, slain in the woods of Sand Lake, New York, in the summer of 1908. Her murderer was never identified or apprehended.

We were on our way.

We first visited Sand Lake in 2016 after connecting with town historian Bob Moore, a friendly, snowy-haired man with spectacles who looks exactly like the middle school history and social studies teacher he used to be. Bob showed us vintage postcards, guided us on tours, answered countless emails and phone calls, even fed us seafood chowder and offered up a spare bedroom.

On our behalf, Bob consulted a psychic, who told him maybe he was so obsessed with the case because he was a reincarnated iteration of the murderer. (We kept our eye on Bob for a while after that and made a note never to have him return to that psychic.)

Most importantly, he organized a community: a group of people—some lifelong residents of Taborton, others descendants of people involved in the case, still others simply interested locals—who, over the course of the next four-plus years, would become our Baker Street Irregulars. They shared their knowledge of, and insights into, the region and assisted us as we tracked down clues. (We even roped in a former FBI agent—not Dale Cooper—to help with the probe, but he disappeared somewhere along the way; we still don’t know what happened to him.)

Chills crawled down our spines as descendants and family members of crucial figures in the case shared firsthand recollections of their ancestors, such as the grandchildren of Hazel’s cousin Etta Becker, who spent the July Fourth weekend with her in 1908, less than forty-eight hours before her death. Unfortunately, whatever they talked about during those final conversations never shook that far down the family tree.

We learned, among other things, that the Taborton woods may or may not be haunted by otherworldly spirits, but they almost certainly hosted feverish anti-Catholic meetings of the Ku Klux Klan–like American Protective Association inside their caves, not far from where local

youngsters erected treehouses and teenagers trysted away from the eyes of their parents.

We heard a long-standing rumor among locals that three influential townspeople—a doctor, a lawyer, and an undertaker—had played a role in Hazel’s death and the ensuing cover-up, though none of the three has ever been definitively identified. In Sand Lake rumors were easier to track down than actual names.

We hit roadblocks—plenty of them. There’s nothing easy about investigating a 113-year-old cold case. Bob Moore tried valiantly to pry records from the Larkin Brothers Funeral Home, where Hazel’s autopsy was performed, but all we wound up with was an entry in a logbook. We located a photo of a very young Hazel Drew with her mother but couldn’t persuade the family to share it. We searched high and low for the county’s investigative records; turns out they were likely shipped off for storage and destroyed in a flood. Nothing remains—no paper records, no physical artifacts, no physical evidence whatsoever. One afternoon, the Rensselaer County clerk dropped a huge box of coroner reports on our laps, including parchments from as far back as the 1870s. Anything from 1908? Of course not.

Most devastatingly, we lost one of our “amateur sleuths,” lifelong Taborton resident John Walsh, who passed away on October 11, 2019, at the age of fifty-five. It was Walsh who had first helped Mark Frost research the case, decades earlier, while Mark was developing *Twin Peaks*.

We came *very* close—we briefly thought—to blowing the case wide open with the discovery that Anna LaBelle, who worked at Frear’s department store in Troy and knew Hazel Drew (the extent of their friendship remains a mystery), shared a name with a small-time madam in Troy (alias: Alice Davis) who was active in the city’s red-light district, known as the Line. This Anna LaBelle, the madam, left her estate, valued at about twenty-six thousand dollars, to Abbott Jones, a powerful Troy lawyer who defended gangster Jack “Legs” Diamond in 1931 against charges of kidnapping and assault (never mind that he was gunned down the day after his acquittal following a romp in the sack with his mistress). Jones was elected district attorney of Rensselaer County shortly after the Hazel Drew murder, defeating Jarvis O’Brien, who had led the investigation.

Were the two Anna LaBelles one and the same? If so, did it have any bearing on the Hazel Drew investigation?

Question two became irrelevant once we discovered the answer to question one: there was no connection between the two Anna LaBelles.

So *that's* what it felt like for the detectives trying to crack the case in 1908.

That lead came courtesy of Mark Marshall, a retired Averill Park school messenger who ran point for us on the ground in Sand Lake and is responsible for many of the ideas and revelations that follow. Mark grew up in Griswold Heights, a housing project on the east side of Troy, about six blocks from where Hazel Drew last lived; his current neighborhood, in East Poestenkill, still houses the remains of the church that the Drew family attended. Soon we were calling him “the Detective.”

If Mark Marshall and Bob Moore had been around in 1908, the murder of Hazel Drew would have been solved.

Hazel Drew was killed in Taborton but lived in Troy, about ten and a half miles northwest of Sand Lake. We soon discovered this was really a tale of two cities (technically one town and one city). Six years ago we hardly knew anything about Troy; now we could write a book, except it's already been done, many times, usually by local historian Don Rittner. Who knew that Uncle Sam was the namesake of Samuel Wilson, a Troy butcher who supplied meat to the troops during the War of 1812? That “’Twas the Night Before Christmas” was first published in the *Troy Sentinel*, submitted by the daughter of a Trojan rector? President Chester Arthur grew up in Troy; Herman Melville wrote *Typee* and *Omoo* there. George Washington Gale Ferris Jr., inventor of the Ferris wheel, graduated from Troy's Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

There are scoundrels and ignominy, too: Mary Alice Fahey (Mame Faye) ran her ridiculously profitable prostitution business on the streets of downtown Troy (with protection from police). Jack “Legs” Diamond was acquitted in the courthouse there, and it was Troy hatter Thomas P. “Boston” Corbett who put a bullet in the head of John Wilkes Booth in a Virginia barn in 1865.

Twin Peaks brought us here, and it is to *Twin Peaks* that we now return.