

HORN POND HAS CLAIMED THE HELPLESS, THE STRONG, THE YOUNG AND THE DESPERATE

by Marie Coady

On a fine summer day Horn Pond invokes a feeling of serenity and well being. Barring a stiff wind, its softly, rippling water summons a calmness that relaxes and restores you. It seems to draw all your cares into its black depths. But that same pond that today is an oasis away from a world of everyday demands, and seems only to serve as a picturesque backdrop worthy of paint and canvas, once claimed the lives of the helpless, the strong, the young, and the desperate.

In June 1997, I wrote a history of the drownings that occurred at Horn Pond highlighting 18 of the victims I'd discovered through research compiled from a list of Woburn Deaths (1642-1900) and newspaper accounts from 1846-1945. But I always felt somehow guilty leaving out the personal stories of the other victims, who became merely names on a list at the end of the article. So I would like to rectify that omission by once again revisiting the subject of drownings at Horn Pond and relating some of the stories I had to overlook due to considerations of space and word count.

It's the tales of the children that tug at my heartstrings, and I was particularly moved by the stories of Martha Hood, Maggie McIntyre, and Maxine Catania and think it important you come to know them as I do.

It was an Indian Summer Saturday in September of 1846, when Martha Hood was last seen playing by the locks of the Middlesex Canal on what is now Arlington Road. Martha was described in newspaper accounts as "an interesting little girl of about 2 years of age" who, in the company of another little girl, was last seen frolicking along the narrow bridges and walls of the canal locks before she apparently slipped and fell into the canal. The pity was that her plight went unnoticed, "or she might have been saved". But as fate would have it there was no canal tender nearby that day who could get to her in time.

Maggie McIntyre lived on Water Street, and although she was not actually drown in Horn Pond, she did succumb to drowning in a stream just below the Davis Tannery on nearby Water Street. Evidently, Maggie was playing in a seemingly harmless stream when she tripped and fell, hit her head and landed face down in just enough water to snuff the life from a 21 month old toddler. Her father, Patrick McIntyre, found her lifeless body only minutes too late, lying in that stream on a Tuesday evening in June, 1871.

But it was the grim tragedy that took the life of 6 year-old Maxine Catania that tugs so hard at your heartstrings. It was a hot day in August and Foley Beach was packed with bathers and, as was Maxine's custom, she and a group of

other girls made their way to Foley Beach early each morning. No one is sure how long Maxine was missing, but it wasn't until late afternoon that a bather nearly tripped over her lifeless body while wading in shallow water.

Lifeguard Joseph Giffune tired valiantly to resuscitate Maxine, but it was too late. Even the fire department's new inhalator couldn't do the job. Maxine was declared dead by Dr. Fred West at 4 p.m., August 21, 1945. She was born in Woburn, the daughter of James and Martha (Humphrey) Catania and lived at 4 Vining Court. She was survived by 4 sisters and 3 brothers and was buried the following Thursday in Calvary Cemetery.

Horn Pond claimed not only the young and helpless, but also the desperate. And there was no more desperate a soul than Mrs. Nancy Edgerly. Nancy had been ill for some time. She had even been confined to an "insane asylum" on two previous occasions, and had recently told some "she would drown herself".

But on that Monday morning she left her place of residence, a boarding house near the pond, no one thought to stop her in spite of the fact that thinking back on it, some at the boarding house noticed she was particularly excited that day. That was about 9 a.m. on a Monday at the beginning of August 1861, and not too long after a young boy, passing near the foot of Richardson Street, saw her struggling in the water. By the time he secured the help of nearby fishermen, all that was left to do was pull her lifeless form from the water. Even the efforts of a doctor who was called to the scene were in vain. Mrs. Nancy Edgerly was 59 years old. She was buried the following day with little fanfare.

When Abbie Davis' naked body was found floating on the West Side of Horn Pond, she had been missing from home since early morning. Although there were no marks found on her body to indicate foul play, there was some question as to whether her death was a suicide or of more suspicious origins.

It seems Abbie had recently, and none too auspiciously, become Mrs. John Fay, and some had reason to suspect her married life was none too happy. In fact, some suspected she may have been murdered and her body thrown into Horn Pond and made to look like an accident by folding her clothing neatly and leaving them near the water's edge as if she went for a swim.

When the Union Weekly published the story on June 28, 1884, the reporter claimed it was very unusual for a woman to go bathing "in a state of nudity". He implored the police to follow up on the story and make sure the circumstances of Abbie Davis Fay's death did not occur under more suspicious circumstances. No follow up was done and Abbie Davis Fay went down in the record books as a suicide.

But there was no mistake about the death of Mary Darmody. When her shoes and shawl were found in the Canal Street (Arlington Road) side of Horn Pond,

where she had been spending a few days with relatives, friends were certain Mary had taken her own life. In fact, she'd left a note to that effect in her pocketbook, a note that directed her friends to look for her in the pond. It was Officer McDermott who found Mary face down in the water, on August, 21, 1890, "as though she had walked in the water as far as she could and thrown herself into its depths".

Mary Darmody was 28 years old and was a domestic in the home of Frank Lane of Winchester. She had only been in this country less than a year. Her shoes and shawl were identified as belonging to her by her family and friends who mourned her passing.

Well, here I am once again out of space and word count after only having related 6 more of the stories I originally uncovered. But rest assured I will revisit this subject another time, for my conscience would be too heavily burdened lest I shared the remaining stories with you.

Till then, you can access the story of the 18 drownings I wrote about in 1997 by visiting the Ye Olde Woburn Web site's Chronicles of Woburn page at www.yeoldewoburn.com/Chronhorn.htm

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