

Who killed Jane Marie?

The 8-year-old's shocking murder at a 1951 carnival would echo for decades in Delaware County's consciousness.

By JOHN M. ROMAN
Of the Times Staff

Their father was in jail, and their mother went to a prayer meeting, so the three Althoff children — Lamar, 16; Jane Marie, 8; and 6-year-old Paul — decided to go to the carnival on their own.

Their left their Booth Street home in Chester's McCaffery Village project shortly after dinner on April 26, 1951, heading to the Penn Premiere Shows on Post Road in Trainer.

But carnival operators would not let Lamar inside with his bike and he went home. Jane Marie and Paul met a friend, 7-year-old Betty Shea. At one point during the evening, Betty saw Jane Marie whispering with 30-year-old Ferris wheel operator William Redmond, but Jane Marie wouldn't say what was going on.

It was "a secret," Jane Marie told her.

The children got separated, and eventually Betty and Paul went home. When Jane Marie didn't follow, her mother Inez sent Lamar back to the fairgrounds to get her.

She couldn't be found. Lamar went to the police.

Shortly after midnight, Trainer Patrolman Herman "Whitey" Triplett discovered Jane Marie's tiny body on the front seat of a truck near a giant spotlight at West Fourth and Price streets.

The Clayton School second-grader, who loved animals and birds, had been sexually assaulted and smothered. Someone held a hand over her mouth and nose — apparently to stifle her outcry.

Grease stains in the shape of a hand were found on her underpants. Chocolate candy wrappers were on the floor and in one of her boots.

Cops try to crack case

The murder stunned the county. Headlines blared the news.

There were 2,000 people at the carnival that night. Police had 2,000 suspects, Chief County Detective Fred Jack said.

Barkers, ticket-takers, concession workers, dancing girls, human oddities and daredevils were fingerprinted and grilled before the show left town. Police questioned and released four suspects.



Jane Marie Althoff, then 8 who was found molested and strangled at a carnival in Trainer

Times file photo

But lawmen soon zeroed in on Redmond, who was interrogated but denied involvement. He quit the carnival after it left town, failing to even collect his pay before he left.

Authorities learned that Redmond had a long criminal record dating back to 1928, including being detained in Ohio youth facilities for sexual attacks on preteen girls.

A warrant was issued for his arrest eight months later — Jan. 3, 1952. It was never served.

Redmond had vanished.

Police tried to find him. One even went undercover, working as a carry with the carnival to search for clues.

But at the time of Jane Marie's death there were no computers or a National Crime Information Center to keep tabs on fugitives. Fingerprinting was the primary investigative tool. DNA testing didn't exist.

Triplett, who became borough police chief six months after joining the force, quit his post after three years to get a better-paying job.

When Triplett left, John J. Flannery became Trainer's chief. He inherited the puzzling case — and empty files. "No one really knows what happened to them," Flannery told the *Daily Times* many years later.

Redmond lived quietly under his own name. He was later traced to a copper mine



William Redmond, at far left, was arrested for the slaying 36 years later. But the case was derailed when allegations emerged that then-Trainer Police Chief Herman Triplett, left, may have been the killer.

out west, but it was closed by a strike. He spent the next 36 years living the itinerant life of a merchant marine, miner and truck driver.

The so-called "Carnival Murder" case fell into limbo for nearly four decades.

A death remembered

But it was dusted off in October 1985 when incoming Trainer Chief Hubert Morris, who died in December 1997, became curious about the missing files and asked State Trooper Malcolm Murphy, an experienced child sex-crime investigator, for assistance.

Time capsule

In September 1951 in Delaware County

- Susie Hayward starred in "14"
- Climb the Highest Mountain at the Boyd Theater in Chester
- The Log Cabin restaurant opened on Baltimore Pike, two miles west of Media
- The Phillies shared Shibe Park, Connie Mack Stadium, with the Athletics
- A black and white photo: Big band picture with "True Friends" could be yours for as low as 45 cents per day at M.J. Fried's, 515 Market St., Chester, according to an ad in the *Chester Times*.

Murphy dug up an 800-page file on the case in the county courthouse. He spent the next two years diligently tracking clues.

The persistent trooper ran Redmond's name and birth date through a computer check and got a hit in the Nebraska motor vehicle files.

Murphy headed west, to Grand Island. In January 1988, he came face-to-face with Redmond, then 66. Murphy would later contend that's when Redmond con-

Continued on page 9

A murder that stayed a mystery

Continued from PAGE 7

fessed, admitting he killed Jane Marie when she started to scream.

Exactly 36 years and nine months after the slaying, Redmond — suffering from acute emphysema and a heart condition — returned via train to Delaware County on Jan. 26, 1988.

But the case was far from closed. Getting a conviction from the ruins of an investigation nearly four decades old wouldn't be easy, several attorneys said.

The top detectives were dead. There was no preserved physical evidence. All authorities had were two verbal confessions given to Murphy in the Nebraska sheriff's office and on the train in Iowa. They were neither taped nor signed.

Defense Attorney Michael Malloy claimed that the confessions were coerced.

Then the case took a stunning twist. At a pretrial hearing, Murphy — on the stand — testified that a confidential informant once told him someone else committed the crime:

Former Trainer Police Chief Herman Triplett.

Malloy said records showed the case was reopened after the informant tipped authorities that Triplett "was the killer and nobody would act on the information." Malloy charged that Triplett was known to "brutalize" prisoners and vagrants.

County Judge Rita Prescott barred Murphy — the state's only witness — from taking the stand unless he identified the informant. Murphy refused, saying

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Interviews and Daily Times archives provided information for this week's story.

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such a disclosure would jeopardize other cases.

As then-District Attorney William Ryan appealed her ruling, Prescott allowed Redmond to go home.

On Jan. 2, 1992, he died from complications from emphysema at a nursing home. Eight days later, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court affirmed Prescott's decision.

With Redmond's death, the case was closed, Ryan decided.

Questions linger

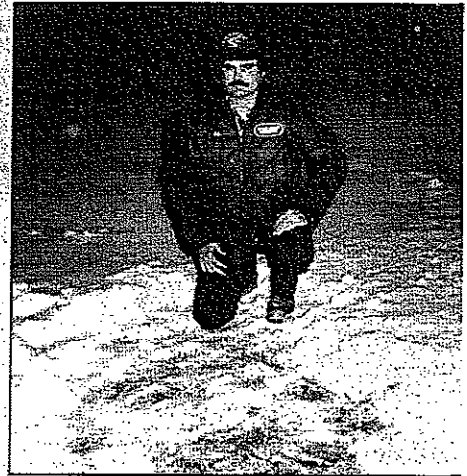
After Redmond's arrest, authorities across the country traced his steps and reopened other unsolved murders. He was called a suspect in several girls' slayings in New York, Connecticut — and just recently, in Michigan. One victim was the 10-year-old granddaughter of a former governor of Wyoming. None have been solved.

Today, Malloy still believes Triplett was the killer. He said when the



Times file photos

State Trooper Malcolm Murphy, William Redmond and Trainer Police Chief Hubert Morris, left to right, arrive in Paoli on Jan. 26, 1988, above; at right, a cemetery worker points out Jane Marie Althoff's unmarked grave that year.



chief left Trainer, he headed South with a teenaged girl. Triplett is now deceased. Malloy staunchly believes Redmond would have been found not guilty.

"The arrest of Redmond didn't solve the case — it created more questions than it resolved," he said.

Murphy retired a year ago and could not be reached for comment.

Jane Marie's surviving siblings still have painful memories.

Her oldest sister, Ruth Althoff Fitzpatrick of

Ridley Township, who was about 14 at the time of the killing, doesn't like the continued attention the case receives. "I don't know why the news media keeps bringing this up," she said.

Paul Althoff died in 1987.

Lamar Althoff, now a 64-year-old resident of King George, Va., remembers being treated roughly by detectives who questioned him repeatedly as a suspect. "I was taken to Media and given lie detector tests but nothing ever became of it," he said.

In the initial weeks following her slaying, "I don't think they (police) did everything they could. Once the carnival left town, the case was put in a drawer somewhere."

"I don't think authorities put that much effort into it ... never told us what was going on or kept in touch with us," Lamar said.

He's not convinced Redmond was the killer. He said last week he never heard Triplett was a suspect.

"It (the murder) was quite

a shock ... because thin like that just didn't happen in those days, Althoff said

Ryan — now director of the criminal law division of the state Attorney General's office — still believes Murphy got the right man

"Redmond ... was brought to trial, but he was never cleared either — a his confession to Malco. Murphy is still there ... a is credible," Ryan said.

"We'll never know what the outcome would have been."

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