

A TRAGIC
EVENT
AT
KIELER.

INCLUDED
WITH
ONE
LETTER
From
1905 or
1906.

2.8 1905 of Her Little Ones and more to shock Commits Suicide KIELER WI 1905

The dead bodies of a mother and four children, each with a frightful gash in the back, the walls of the bedroom in which they lay bespattered with blood and the floor in the same gory condition, told the story of one of the most awful tragedies that has been perpetrated in this section in years. The woman was Mrs. Paul Klaas, and her home, in which the crime was committed, is located one mile south of the hamlet of Kieler, in Grant county, Wisconsin. The entire affair is shrouded in mystery. The coroner's jury which sat on the case Thursday night returned a verdict to the effect that the four children came to their death at the hands of their mother and that she committed suicide.

Girl Finds the Bodies.

It is believed the crime was committed Wednesday evening. Mr. Klaas, the husband and father, is a carpenter by trade and left his home at 5:00 a. m. Wednesday for his work, located several miles distant. Mrs. Klaas arose early and prepared his meal and appeared happy and contented. During the day she was seen several times, always engaged in household duties, and the children were observed playing up to about supper time.

Ethel Hoppman, the daughter of a neighbor, went to the Klaas home Thursday evening as was her custom. The house was still. She was usually greeted with peals of laughter from the Klaas children and was surprised at the silence. She concluded the family had retired and walked around to the bedroom window and looked in.

She saw her playmates lying cold in death and spattered with blood, and the mother lying on the floor with an ugly looking butcher knife near by.

The child was frightened and ran to a neighbor's and related the story of her discovery.

Woman Was Terrorstricken.

Mrs. Herman Dalting was the first to arrive on the scene. She went to the house immediately after the Hoppman girl had told her story. It is a half mile to the Klaas home. Arriving she discovered Mrs. Klaas on the floor covered with blood and with both hands clasped under her chin. She held a poisonous weed in her left hand and against the wound, evidently to make sure of her suicidal work. Mrs. Dalting was terrified. She thought the woman was not dead and was afraid she might attack her.

The news of the awful crime spread rapidly and a large number of neighbors gathered at the home.

Dead Bodies Are Found.

A couple of men entered the bedroom and found the bodies of the mother and her murdered children, as the Hoppman girl reported. The floor of the room was covered with blood and the furniture and walls were spattered. A hasty examination showed that all five came to death by the same instrument. The knife had been driven across the necks of each from ear to ear.

The children were in their night robes. Evidently the mother lifted them each in turn from the bed before ending their lives as there was little blood on the bed clothes. From the evidence produced it is believed she allowed them to bleed to death on the floor and then put them back on their cots.

The oldest child was Mary, four years old. She was found in bed, as also was the second, Frederick, 3 years old. John, aged 2 years, was lying in his cradle and Louis, 6 months, was found in his cradle.

Mother Walked About After Deed.

Bloody foot prints of the mother were found about the kitchen, where she walked about after the deed had been committed. From the evidence it is believed she awaited the death of the last of her children before she brought her own life to an end.

The bloody prints were traced from the bedroom through the kitchen, towards the parlor and door. However, no trace was left outside as it rained heavily Wednesday night.

In the coroner's inquest the discovery of foot prints was investigated but the only marks revealed were those in the house.

After the spark of life had flickered out from the children Mrs. Klaas evidently returned to the bedroom and cut her own throat.

Inquest Is Held.

In the absence of the county coroner the Justice of the Peace Schroeder of Wat Kieler empaneled the following jury, which sat Thursday evening: Herman Dalting, Frank Lister, Will Dredgen, Ben Hoppman, John Kiser and John Lyster.

Little evidence was produced at the inquest and all that was offered was so circumstantial. No one saw the crime committed. The bodies were examined and it was the opinion of competent

men that they had been killed about twenty-two hours. None of the family was seen from the evening of

Wednesday up to the time when the Hoppman girl saw them lying dead.

The session was short and the jury returned the following verdict:

"We, the jury, find the Klaas children, Mary, Frederick, John and Louis, came to their death at the hands of their mother and she came to her death by her own hand."

Husband Is Prostrated.

Word was sent to Mr. Klaas. He returned to his home almost prostrated. His wife was happy when he left in the morning, and the children were in dreamland. So intense was his anguish he required assistance when he alighted from the buggy at his door.

Because of a peculiar family belief the bodies were not embalmed and the undertaker was instructed that no one be permitted to see the dead. Owing to the state of decomposition the remains were placed on ice.

Insanity in the Family.

Neighbors of the Klaas family profess utter ignorance as to the cause of the woman's act and assert the crime is a deep mystery to them as it is to the public. Insanity was suggested as a solution, but friends of the family declared there is no trace of it in the family.

However, it has been asserted that J. M. Johnson, father of the murderers and suicide, was once confined to an asylum. This could not be substantiated.

Immediately after the bodies were found the story was given out that the woman was crazed by prolonged illness. Later developed facts do not bear out this statement. She was not, however, a strong woman and has been in poor health for a long time.

Act Was Premeditated.

There is little doubt that the act was premeditated and cold blooded. The instrument of destruction was a vicious looking butcher knife, 14 inches long with a blade 1 5-8 inches broad. It had not been newly sharpened, evidently just before the murder and for that purpose.

The cuts were clean and death must have been all but instantaneous, save in the case of Mary, the oldest child. The wind pipes and jugular veins of the others were severed and the innocent children apparently did not feel the pain of the mother's awful deed.

Mary Was Stabbed.

Mary, evidently awoke before the mother was ready to kill her. She was stabbed. It is thought she realized her mother's intent and tried to escape. The blade pierced her tender neck and severed the jugular. Besides being stabbed her neck was laid open.

Father Knows No Reason.

Paul Klaas, the father, in his grief declares his imagination can frame no

reason for his wife's slaughter of their children. He said:

"I don't know why she did it. When I left home Wednesday morning and she appeared well and happy and there was nothing to indicate she was in any way demented. I had to leave at 5:00 a. m. and she got up and got my breakfast. I don't know why she did it," he sobbed.

He was overcome as he finished and wandered to the end of the yard, where he sat in the shade of a tree and struggled with his grief.

Before arriving at the scene of the murder the reporter stopped at the home of the dead children's grandmother, Mrs. Klaas. She was shining the kitchen stove and when she looked up it was evident the bitterness of grief was weighing her down. Her eyes were filled with tears as she directed the reporter to her son's home. "She killed them all—the four of them," she sobbed.

House Is Lonely Spot.

The Klaas home is situated in a lonely spot. It is off the main road several blocks and it was necessary to drive through fields and pastures to reach it. It is surrounded by evergreens which hide it from view until within a stone's throw.

Murder Theory Dismissed.

There was some talk of murder after the bodies had been found, but this was snap judgment. The evidence which was laid before the jury furnished no prop for this solution.

Many refuse to believe the mother could have committed the crime and then cut her own throat, but the evidence of the woman's bloody foot prints seems to show the quadruple murder was her work, unnatural as is the crime. Residents of the vicinity of the Klaas home have nearly all dismissed the murder theory and are coming to accept as fact that Mrs. Klaas killed her children and then herself.

Woman Held in High Esteem.

Mrs. Klaas was well known in Grant county and especially in the southern portion. She was born near Kieler about 26 years ago and lived in that vicinity all her life.

She was united in marriage to Paul Klaas about five years ago. Her reputation was of the best and she was generally recognized as a hard working and conscientious woman whose every desire focused in the advancement of the interests of her family.

Her home life was apparently happy and as far as neighbors knew no domestic trouble marred her married life.

Five Buried Together.

The bodies of the mother and four children will be placed in one grave. The funeral will be held Sunday morning from the home to St. Mary's cemetery at Kieler, where interment will be made.