

## **The Dr. Snook and Coed Theora Hix Affair and Murder**

Dr. James Howard Snook was born on a farm in South Lebanon, OH in Warren County in 1879.

He eventually was graduated from the Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine, Columbus, Ohio, in 1908. He joined the faculty shortly afterwards and took a strong interest in pistol shooting then. He probably used the New York Central pistol range just outside of Columbus, Ohio at Fisher Road near McKinley Ave. for target practice.

He was on the faculty of the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine in 1920 when he was named as a replacement for 1920 Olympic team that competed in the pistol matches in Antwerp, Belgium. He won the gold medal for that event.

He invented the Snook hook to help with the spaying of cats and dogs. This instrument is still in use today.

In 1922 he married Helen Marple and had daughter Mary 2 years later.

About 1926 at age 46 he became involved with an OSU medical student, Theora Hix, who worked in the veterinary medicine offices as a stenographer. She was born in Johnson City, New York in 1905. She went to school at the prestigious Northfield Seminary in Massachusetts.

Their relationship grew rather quickly and they eventually met at a rooming house on the edge of campus for trysts about 2 or 3 times a week. Dr. Snook gave her money for her personal use and also helped with her tuition. Dr. Snook told the landlady that Theora was his wife.

The affair went on for about 2 years. Ms. Helen Snook, wife of James, was apparently oblivious to the philandering that was noticeable by the veterinary faculty. The philandering almost cost Dr. Snook his job.

There was a murderous rendezvous in Dr. Snook's new dark blue 1929 Ford coupe at the New York Central pistol range on the night of 13 June 1929. She was between her sophomore and junior year of medical school at this time.

After an awkward attempt at consummation in the coupe, Dr. Snook claimed that Theora was going to harm Ms. Snook and his child if he did not stay with Theora over the coming weekend. Only one side of this argument is available to us since Dr. Snook hit Theora several times in the head with a hammer that was conveniently on the back shelf of the coupe. Her skull was fractured.

While Theora was lying supine outside the coupe on the ground, Dr. Snook said that he felt that he did not want to see her suffer. Supposedly out of compassion he slit her jugular vein and possibly carotid artery with his pocket knife.

Then he panicked and drove away quickly. He threw her purse out the window into the nearby Olentangy River and drove home to have a sandwich and read the newspaper. Ms. Snook met him in their kitchen, but

apparently there was no conversation about his evening. He showed no unusual behavior during his time at home after the murder.

Dr. Snook made careless attempts to hide any evidence of murder. He had someone else clean his car. Dr. Snook later claimed that the blood stains were from dog blood. He put some clothes in the incinerator, but did not completely burn this evidence. He washed the hammer and knife carelessly without eliminating all the evidence still on them.

Theora's body was found the next day. Eventually Dr. Snook was visited by Columbus detectives because the landlady for the apartment for trysting recognized Theora's photo in the newspaper story and thought that she was Dr. Snook's wife.

Dr. Snook was located and taken downtown and interviewed for many hours. A confession was drawn up by handsome Jack Chester, Jr, the prosecutor. Dr. Snook was almost coerced into signing a confession of first degree murder. Later Dr. Snook tried to retract his near admission of guilt.

Almost from the night of the murder on 13 June until late summer the Columbus papers and others across the nation saw this crime story as a hot news item issue.

Even my local newspaper the Shelby Daily Globe on one front page one day had 3 separate articles about the trial.

Crowds gathered at the court house daily as early as 3 AM to get a seat and hear about the steamy relationship and hideous crime by the professor against a young innocent girl.

Some of the court testimony was not printed by the Columbus newspapers, but there was an underground printing of the explicit sexual testimony that sold out quickly. Eventually the Columbus police confiscated all remaining copies after declaring it obscene material.

Dr. Snook had 3 attorneys trying to overturn the somewhat forced near-confession noted earlier. However, Judge Scarlet allowed the near-confession to stand despite the poor treatment that Dr. Snook received from the prosecutor. During the trial Dr. Snook did say that he regretted killing Ms. Hix.

Notables such as Milton Caniff of Dick Tracy cartoon fame drew caricatures of different participants. James Thurber also wrote sometimes about the trial.

On 14 August 1929 the judge after the jury's verdict of guilty of first degree murder set the date for Dr. Snook's electrocution in the electric chair for 28 Feb 1930 at the Ohio State Penitentiary. The jury deliberations lasted only 28 minutes. Appeals were tried, but they were unsuccessful.

Dr. Snook was buried in Green Lawn Cemetery in Columbus under the headstone reading James Howard 1879-1930. The name Snook was not used on the headstone. At the cemetery office there was to be no mention of the Snook burial site. It was eventually given out in 2005.

His wife stayed in Columbus and died in 1978. The wife and daughter reverted to the wife's maiden name of Marple.

The daughter was protected somewhat from the curiosity of others at school. She was graduated from Bryn Mawr and eventually married and taught school in Hawaii. The trail grows cold for her there.

The fate of the pistols and gold medal is unknown.

A collector in Columbus OH owns the 1929 Ford coupe.

Two books detail the history in moderate detail.

One is: **Gold Medal Killer** by Diana Franklin and Nancy Pennell, 2010, Marquette Books, Spokane, Washington, 99223

The second is: **The Professor and the Coed** by Mark Gribben, 2010, The History Press, Charleston, South Carolina, 29403.

Most of this history has faded into the past. Several issues can still simulate questions. Why was Dr. Snook so oblivious to the seriousness of the crime? Why did the prosecutor's reprehensible behavior toward the defendant, Dr. Snook, get excused? Was capital punishment without an appeal being heard appropriate here? Perhaps no good answers can be offered. Only the questions linger.

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