



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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Murder Most Foul!

Recently I was walking through the Bloominggrove Cemetery and came across the gravestones of four members of the Morner family who died on the same day-Dec. 14, 1911. I was puzzled by this until I remembered that I had been told that there had been a sensational murder in this area in the early twentieth century. I decided to further research this interesting story.

A local milk dealer became concerned when the Morners had failed to deliver their daily milk to his milk station. When he drove by the farm on Best Road, it seemed deserted and the cows hadn't been watered, fed or milked. Alarmed, several neighbors searched the house and barn and found Mrs. Morner and her two daughters buried in a manure pit in the barn and later found the son under the barn's flooring. All the victims had been bludgeoned and stabbed.

Immediately suspicion fell upon Donato, the farm hand who had disappeared. A note, purportedly in his handwriting said "Italian meat and American made sausage imported from Rome, Italy". The authorities thought this must be a clue.

Police immediately began a statewide and later nationwide search for the missing hired hand. "Find the Italian!" newspaper headlines screamed. Several Italian men, having only a slight resemblance to Donato were arrested, released and later re-arrested and released. Bloodhounds were used to track the killer. A "wet and weary stranger" aroused suspicion in West Coxsackie-but it proved to be another dead end. Rewards were offered "for the assassin's capture" but to no avail. Days turned into months and then into years and the crime was never solved.

Jessie Morner, the sole survivor of the family (he was away at the time of the murder) died in 1945, never knowing who killed his family.

Several theories abound. Perhaps Donato was a victim and not the killer. Others point to the fact that the father, Conrad Morner had been found dead in a field "under mysterious circumstances" four years earlier and that a close family friend had been found shot to death in his barn. Maybe there was an undiscovered killer on the loose. Wouldn't today's media have fun covering this story?

DISCLAIMER-The Morner farm is actually in East Greenbush, but news reports at the time referred to the family as Defreestville residents.

I'm researching a story about Frank Houser and his story. Please call me at 283-6384 with any anecdotes, memories or other information.