

Out of the Archives

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Murder Mystery in the Archives: The Case of Marie Jeannette DePape

by Allie Honican, Archivist, Digital Archives

"Slain by A Mid-Night Assassin," screamed a headline of the *Spokesman-Review* on the morning of June 22, 1898, followed by, "Woman's Head A Mass of Wounds and Clotted Blood." Not much was known about the victim the newspaper reported, except that she was a "French prostitute living at 323 Front avenue," and "the discovery of the body was made by her husband."

It was a reference request to the Eastern Regional Branch (ERB) of the Washington State Archives that set me on the trail of this forgotten crime. French descendants of Gustave Saillard emailed the ERB in December of 2015 looking for a death record for his wife, Marie Saillard. They had no idea that she had been murdered, or that she was a prostitute.



Headstone of Marie DePape, Fairmount Cemetery, Spokane, WA.

A search through our records failed to turn up a death return for Marie Saillard. However, another death return caught my eye. Marie DePape was a French woman who had died on the date Saillard's family provided. Could Marie DePape be Marie Saillard? Another detail from the certificate jumped out as well. The cause of death read: "wounds by murder."

A quick trip to the Google News Archives (which includes images of nearly all of Spokane's historic newspapers) led to the article above which confirmed Marie DePape was in fact Marie Saillard. And surprisingly DePape was also Martha Delaney, who had been operating under a fake name, as many prostitutes did. They used her maiden name on the death record, a curious convention.

With some help from Google Translate, I began a correspondence with the requester. The family in France knew the woman died because of the letters her husband sent back to his eldest brother in

the city of Ornans, a small town in the French department of Doubs. Many of the family still live in Ornans today. They were surprised, to put it mildly, by what I had to show them, but also grateful for the information. Thanks to this family thousands of miles away, I was able to rediscover this forgotten Spokane mystery and the thorough newspaper articles that traced the crime and trial.

So who were DePape and Saillard? The couple were French immigrants living in Spokane in the 1890s. Spokane rapidly expanded during this time, as immigrants and Easterners flooded west, seeking opportunity and advancement. This couple went by multiple names, as was common for immigrants and for people living on the edges of respectable society. They anglicized their names to be more easily pronounced by English-speakers, and perhaps to assimilate into American culture. In a time before government-issued photo ID cards and Social Security numbers, it was easy to simply change the spelling of your last name or alter it all together.



Downtown Spokane, 1890s.

Marie Saillard was born Marie Jeannette DePape, and was known around Spokane as Martha Delaney or Delanoy. Gustave Saillard went by various names including William Gaston, Paul Gaston, and Gaston Saillard but was actually born Jean-Louis Gustave Saillard. At the time of the murder, Gustave was 42 years old and Marie was 32. Little is known about their early lives, but the two eventually crossed paths in Liverpool, England, where they married in 1883.

According to ship manifests the couple traveled extensively. They came to New York City in the fall of 1885, and made it to Spokane by 1890. They eventually went back to Europe, and then came

back to New York in 1893. The couple headed west and arrived back in Spokane by 1895. Saillard worked odd jobs as a draughtsman and cigar jobber to make ends meet, although he seems mainly to have been supported by his wife's profession.

In the 1890s, prostitution was common in virtually all American cities. As today, women's motivations for entering the trade were varied and complex. Some were forced, some had no other options, and others preferred the relative independence the profession provided. In the 1900 census, Spokane's prostitute population was listed at a surely underreported 96 women, more than half of them foreign-born. Japanese women held the highest number of foreign-born prostitutes, followed by French women. French prostitutes were highly regarded, and often demanded higher prices—so much so that American-born prostitutes sometimes pretended to be French to earn more money.

2800 2 DePape

2800 96

DEATH RETURN.

1. Name of Deceased *Marie Jeannette DePape*

2. Date of Death *22nd of June*

3. Age Last Birthday *32 years*

4. Sex *feminine*

5. Color (a) *White*

6. Married, Single, Widow or Widower *Married*

7. Place of Death *334 Front St*

8. Disease or Cause of Death *Wounds (by murder)*

9. Birthplace (b) *Paris France*

10. Residence *Spokane*

11. Occupation

12. Father's Name *Paris France Louis DePape*

13. Father's Birthplace (b) *Paris France*

14. Mother's Maiden Name *Delanoix*

15. Mother's Birthplace (b) *Paris France*

State of Washington, County of *Spokane* ss.

I hereby certify that the above is a true return of the Death, and of the other facts here recorded.

Dated at *Spokane* Washington, this *25* day of *June* 1898

John L. Kuwabara M. D. (c)

NOTE.—(a) State color distinctly, so race may be known, as White, Black, Mulatto, Indian, Chinese, Mixed White and Indian, etc.
(b) Give State or foreign country, so nationality is plainly indicated.
(c) If returned by any other than Physician, sign as: Accoucheur, Dentist, Coroner, etc.

Coroner

ashington Undertaking Co.

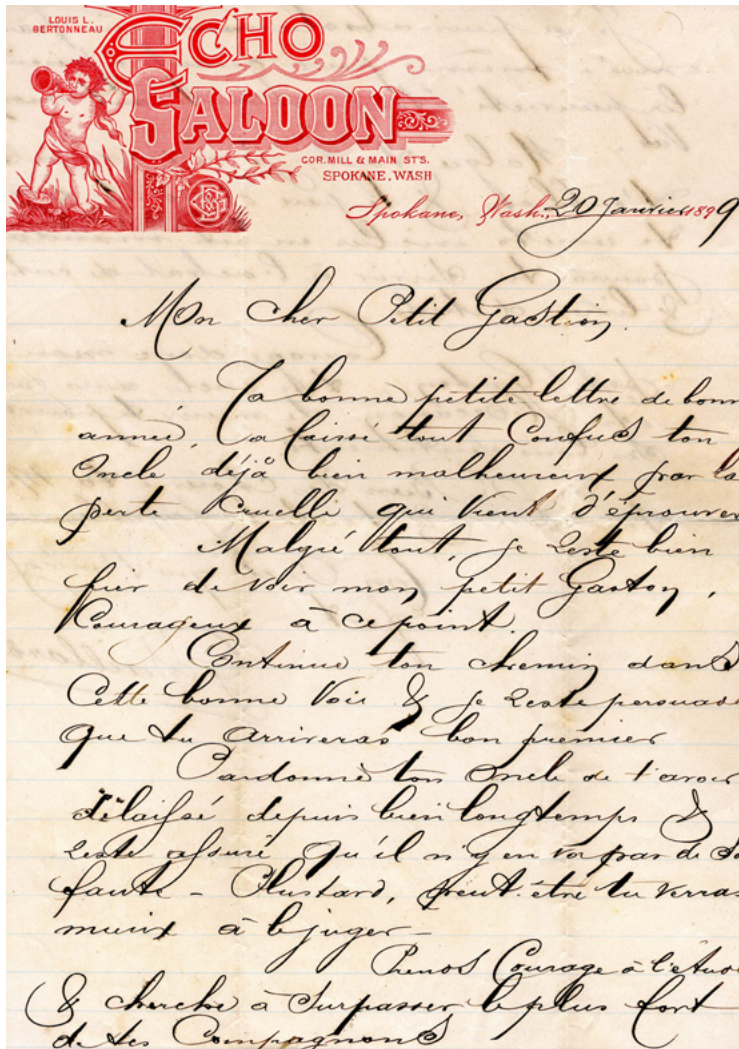
DePape's death return.

DePape appears to have worked alone instead of in a brothel, as she and Saillard lived in a duplex, apparently using one side for work and the other for living. Working alone meant more profits, as DePape would not have had to share her fees with anyone except her husband. It also meant more risk—as would tragically be discovered.

Saillard's role in DePape's prostitution is unknown. He may have forced her into the trade, acted as her pimp, or the couple may have had some other type of arrangement. Whatever the case, Saillard certainly would have known about and appears to have benefited financially from his wife's work. He regularly sent money home to his family in France, and never seems to have a consistent profession himself.

Because of their frequent moves and the nature of DePape's profession, the couple is exceptionally hard to trace in records. They happened to miss every American and British census, and are rarely recorded anywhere besides ship manifests. The couple largely lived in obscurity until the evening of June 21, 1898.

The mysterious and brutal murder of a prostitute was big news in Spokane, and the newspapers tell the story. According to Saillard, that Tuesday evening he was out drinking with his buddies at his friend,



January 20, 1899 letter, page 1.

Louis Bertonneau's bar, the Echo Saloon. The Echo was located on the corner of Main and Mill (now Wall Street), just a few blocks from their home. Saillard left the saloon around one o'clock in the morning and arrived at home to discover his wife dead and with "her skull completely crushed in."

He rushed back to the saloon and told his friends what he discovered. They called the police and headed back to the scene of the crime. Two police officers, the sheriff, and the coroner all arrived at the house by two o'clock. Inside was a gruesome scene. "The body lay upon the bed, and the bedclothes were completely saturated with blood. Everywhere throughout the room there was evidence of the crime. The woman's clothing indicated she had fought desperately for her life." They took DePape's mangled body to the coroner's office for a future inquest.

Initially the police arrested "a drunken man in the lodging house at 331 Main Avenue, who had blood on his hands, neck and clothes," who "acted in a suspicious manner." But by the next morning he was apparently ruled out. Next, the police

turned their attention to her husband, Saillard. The police thought his story about where he had been the evening of the murder was a sham.

When Saillard was arrested for his wife's murder on June 24, 1898, he hired attorneys from the firm Nuzum, Nuzum, and Robertson for his defense. The coroner held the inquest of the body on Monday, June 27, a full six days after the murder had taken place. Gaston was sitting in jail and missed Marie's funeral, which was held on June 29, but he provided the funds for an elaborate headstone to mark her grave.

Saillard's attorneys filed a Writ of Habeas Corpus on July 22, 1898 asking for the evidence against Saillard and to fix a bail amount. The judge ruled that the defendant be presented with the evidence against him, and that bail be set. It was not until January of 1899 that the trial began.

For a full two weeks, the Saillard trial was a sensation. "Fighting for Life: Gustave Saillard is Trying to Escape the Gallows," blared a typical headline in the Spokesman Review. The Spokane Chronicle pronounced, "His Neck in Danger, Black Evidence Being Given Against Saillard." The prosecution claimed Saillard and DePape were fighting the evening that he allegedly murdered her. They produced witnesses who said they heard the conflict, and claimed Saillard was the man involved. The police asserted they had been to their home before and witnessed the aftermath of domestic violence. In a grisly touch of courtroom theater, the prosecution provided the murdered woman's

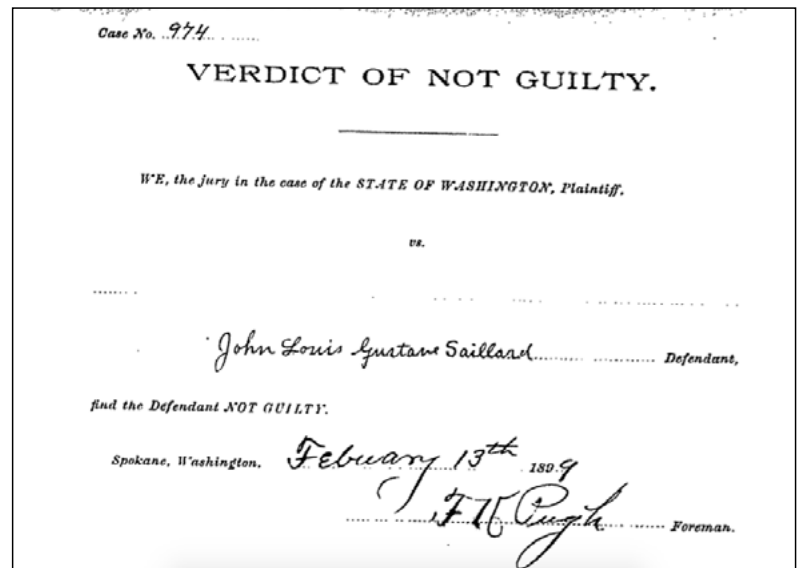
preserved scalp as evidence.

The defense maintained that Saillard was at the Echo Saloon the entire evening and produced numerous witnesses to corroborate this claim, including Bertonneau and "Dutch Jake" Goetz, both of whom maintained they spent the entire evening with Saillard, and that he did not leave the bar until late in the evening. Prostitutes living adjacent to the Saillard residence also reported an unfamiliar tall man lurking around and acting strange that evening and the next day. Two of the prostitutes who were witnesses in the trial reported disquieting interactions with the man and suspicious activity. This mysterious fellow was never questioned or pursued by the police.

On Monday, February 13, 1899, at 8:30 p.m. the jury found Saillard not guilty. The defense rejoiced, and Saillard and his friends celebrated his freedom the way many others would—with a trip to the saloon.

After the trial, Saillard left Spokane. The letters he wrote home, now in the custody of Saillard descendants still living in Ornans, France, provide glimpses of his travels. He went to Europe, and came back to the United States. In 1900 he witnessed the Robert Charles race riots in New Orleans. By 1901 he was on the West Coast again, and set sail for Tahiti and New Zealand. After this Pacific tour, he returned for a while to France, and then went to North Africa. He returned to San Francisco where he witnessed the Great Earthquake of 1906, and spent his remaining days in the City by the Bay. He died there of tuberculosis on December 2, 1908, at 52 years of age, ending a life of adventure and intrigue.

We will never know what really happened to Marie DePape. Her quiet grave sits alone at Spokane's Fairmount Cemetery, tucked under the towering pine trees 5,000 miles from the place of her birth. After Saillard's acquittal, police dropped the case. No murder weapon ever materialized, and the motive will never be known. But her story has again been brought to light after almost 120 years, and Marie will not be forgotten.



Record of verdict, John Saillard, February 13, 1899.