

Preview:

Was 24-year-old Edna May Savage Staples murdered by her physician husband, as town gossip indicated? They hadn't been married very long, just three years, following the death of Dr. Frederic Staples' first wife Mertie May Russell in 1900. Edna and Staples had moved to Amador City from Maine in 1902, to start a new life. Edna was a trained nurse, an ideal companion, it seemed, for the 30-year-old physician. In April 1904, it appeared they had decided to make Amador City their permanent home, buying a large lot to build a house.

At first it seemed Edna had died of typhoid fever, which had been infecting many in the community in the summer of 1904. A qualified nurse attended the patient through most of her sickness, and Dr. Quinn, an outside physician, was called into the case, which was the usual practice when a member of one physician's family was ill.

Dr. Quinn found the sickness was not typical of typhoid fever since Edna's temperature was below normal throughout her illness. She seemed to be getting better and a few days before her death on August 31, 1904, the nurse was discharged, and Dr. Quinn told Staples he didn't need to see Mrs. Staples again, unless she took a turn for the worse. The end was sudden and unexpected.

Mrs. Hoxie, a near neighbor, visited the sick woman occasionally, as did other women in the community. Maud Hoxie was at Edna's bedside when she died, and was the first to convey the sad news to Staples. Dr. Quinn, on seeing Staples afterward, asked why he had not been sent for, and Dr. Staples said he thought it would have been useless.

A gastrointestinal hemorrhage, a frequent complication of typhoid fever, was the cause Staples listed on his wife's death certificate. But why did Dr. Frederic Nathaniel Staples decide to close his business and leave the area shortly after his wife's death? Was he truly planning on visiting relatives in New York as he stated? If so, why so soon after Edna's passing? Also questioned was why he chose to have his dead wife embalmed within an hour of her death, telling the funeral director he had already taken care of cleaning the internal organs. Was he trying to hide something? Then there was the Staples' neighbor, Maud Emeline Hoxie, who was at Edna's bedside when Edna passed away on August 31, 1904.

A week after Edna's death, Maud told her husband Ben Hoxie, who was the underground foreman of the Keystone mine, that she and their daughter were going to visit Maud's parents in El Dorado County. When Hoxie went to pick them up, he found his wife had left their daughter behind with her parents when she told them she had shopping to do in Placerville. She never returned. Asking authorities to find her, Ben voiced his suspicions that she had run away to be with Staples. This, and some features of the death of Mrs. Staples led authorities to investigate the case more thoroughly. The tale of scandal, coupled with hints of dark doings, had everyone in the county talking about it. To quell suspicions, Edna's body, after lying in the grave for more than six weeks, was exhumed and an autopsy performed.

There was nothing apparent to account for death, but the autopsy did establish the fact that death was not brought about by hemorrhage, as the doctor's certificate stated. It was decided to send the internal organs to a chemist in San Francisco to determine if poison was involved. It was. Arsenic was found; it could have come from the embalming fluid or administered purposely. A jury, hearing the results, brought in a verdict that Mrs. Edna May Staples died from the effects of arsenic administered by some unknown person.

By November 1904, Ben Hoxie had traced his wife and Dr. Staples to San Francisco, where the couple were posing as man and wife. It appeared Maud had rented an apartment and Dr. Staples joined her there three weeks later, after he sold his Amador City practice. Here

Staples set up a new medical office, and the pair appeared to have been totally ignorant that Edna's death was now being viewed as suspicious. A newspaper article, which Staples later claimed he had never read, stated that Edna's body had been exhumed and the stomach forwarded to a chemist for analysis. The pair fled the city quickly. Staples did not even take down his doctor's sign, and one trunk was left behind. Staples later claimed they left because Maud's husband had found out where they were. To many it seemed they skipped town to escape murder charges.

In January 1905, they were apprehended near Ensenada, Mexico, and in March brought back to the United States and charged with the murder of Edna May. The case made headlines. When the couple was being transported to Amador County, spectators gathered at every train and stage stop to catch a glimpse of the infamous pair. At Jackson, 400 to 500 gathered along the route to the jail, anxious to view the manacled couple before they disappeared through the doors of the prison that would be their home for several months.

Brought before a judge, they pleaded not guilty of murder. Staples asked that the trial be moved from Amador County, where he felt he could not get a fair trial, because public sentiment was on Ben Hoxie's side.

What happened to Maud Hoxie and Dr. Staples? Were Dr. Staples and Maud Hoxie found guilty of murder? Does Edna May's spirit still haunt the town? For answers and more intrigue read *Amador City: A Haunting History*.