

THOU SHALT NOT

SEPTEMBER 1922. YOUNG WOMAN FINDS LIFE DESTROYED WHEN MOTHER DISCOVERED MURDERED ALONGSIDE NEW BRUNSWICK PRIEST. SHOCKING DOUBLE HOMICIDE. SEPTEMBER 2022. THINKERY & VERSE COLLABORATES WITH CHURCH OF SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST, HOME PARISH OF MINISTER AND CHOIR SINGER, TO CREATE *THOU SHALT NOT*, A RESURRECTION OF INFAMOUS HALL-MILLS MURDERS.

STAGE PLAY RE-IMAGINES HALL-MILLS DOUBLE HOMICIDE OF 1922. PLAY CREATED BY THINKERY & VERSE with WRITING FROM KAREN ALVARADO, JM MEYER, TOMMI BYRNE, and LOU BULLOCK.

ACTORS TO PORTRAY KEY FIGURES IN HALL-MILLS TRAGEDY

Thinkery & Verse are proud to work with ensemble players Johnny Kavanagh (Raymond Schneider/New Brunswick police), Gio Guanill (Ralph Gorsline/Jenny the mule/Senator Simpson), Lazarus Simmons (Edward Hall/neighbor), Aline Stokes (Frances Hall/Edwin Carpenter), and Catherine Bennett (choir understudy). The ensemble also includes Erin Bogert (Pearl Bahmer/Louise Geist), Celine Dirkes (Jane Gibson/ Catherine Rastall/Minnie Clarke), Kaitlin Ormerod (Eleanor Mills), and Madhu Murali (Charlotte Mills) all of whom performed with Thinkery & Verse for the workshop of Sean Ullmer's new musical, *Rita, the Cleaning Lady*.

Special appearances from stage manager and singer Hillel Adiv, music director Sean Ullmer, and co-artistic directors Karen Alvarado (self) and J.M. Meyer (James Mills/police officer.) As always with Thinkery & Verse, all actors will play multiple roles to encourage the audience's imagination.

ARTISTS CLOTHE ACTORS, MAKE THEM DANCE, SHINE LIGHT IN THEIR FACES

Master designer Ashley Basile returns to Thinkery & Verse after previously working on *Bride of the Gulf*, *Dionysus in America*, *Ghost Hunt*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Sarah Woods has designed the lighting, and Harrison Freni serves as electrician. Erin Bogert led the development and fundraising. Henry Strehlo serves as director of photography for an adjacent film project, with additional photography by Rafael Manzares.

SERVICES RESUME AT ST. JOHN'S

Services have resumed at Saint John's, located at 189 George Street in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The

congregation holds traditional liturgical services every Sunday at 10am, and yes, they still have a four-part choir. The children of the congregation assume a leadership role on the third Sunday of each month. The church hosts free community dinners on the last Saturday of each month.

Some members of the congregation 'play the organ,' and others 'knit for the Seamen's institute.' Canon Leroy Lyons, an esteemed member of the diocese, has come out of retirement to preside over the Sunday services. All are welcome to this diverse and forward-looking community.

BUILDING (10,000 sq ft) AVAILABLE TO RENT TO A SERVICE ORIENTED NONPROFIT

In October the St. Mary's school hall behind the Church of Saint John the Evangelist will be available to rent to a service-oriented nonprofit. The two-story building, formerly devoted to Sunday school, is in excellent condition, and has been in continual use since its construction in the 1950s. CALL TODAY (732) 545-5619.

WIKIPEDIA SUMMARIZES HALL-MILLS CASE!!

"The Hall-Mills murder case involved an Episcopal priest and a member of his choir with whom he was having an affair, both of whom were murdered on September 14, 1922, in Somerset, New Jersey. The priest's wife and her brothers were accused of committing the murders, but were acquitted in a 1926 trial in Somerville.

"In the history of journalism, the case is largely remembered for the extent of newspaper coverage it received nationwide; it has been regarded as an example of a media circus. It would take the Lindbergh kidnapping trial in the 1930s to eclipse the high profile of the Hall-Mills murder.

“On September 16, 1922, the bodies of a woman (Eleanor Mills) and a man (Edward Hall) were discovered in a field near a farm. Both bodies were on their backs, both shot in the head with a .32-caliber pistol, the man once and the woman three times. The bullet entered the man's head over his right ear and exited through the back of his neck. The woman was shot under the right eye, over the right temple and over the right ear. A police officer at the scene noticed that the woman's throat had been severed, and maggots were already in the wound, indicating the death occurred at least 24 hours earlier. The bodies appeared to have been positioned side by side after death. Both had their feet pointing toward a crab apple tree. The man had a hat covering his face, and his calling card was placed at his feet. Torn-up love letters were placed between the bodies. Her arm had a bruise, and there was a tiny cut on her lip. Her left hand had been positioned, after death, to touch the man's right thigh.” Her throat had been cut, nearly severing her head. Years later, an autopsy revealed that the woman's tongue and vocal cords had been removed.

“A jurisdictional issue complicated the initial investigation, as the crime scene was near the Middlesex and Somerset borders. New Brunswick (Middlesex County) police arrived first, but the crime scene was actually in Franklin Township (Somerset County). While the authorities addressed the confusion, curiosity-seekers trampled the scene, took souvenirs, and passed Hall's calling card among the crowd. The physical evidence was thus severely compromised.” No autopsies were performed. The bodies were instead poorly embalmed, and then handed over to the respective families. This was problematic as both families were suspected of the crime.

VICTIMS IDENTIFIED

“The woman was identified as Eleanor Reinhardt Mills (born 1888), the wife of James E. Mills, the sexton (groundskeeper and janitor) of the Church of Saint John the Evangelist in New Brunswick, New Jersey (1878–1965).” Most authorities quickly ruled out James Mills as a suspect.

“The man was identified as Edward Wheeler Hall (born 1881), a New Brunswick Episcopal priest married to a wealthy heiress, Frances Noel Stevens Hall.” Frances' older brother, ‘Simple’ Willie Stevens, lived as a dependent with his sister and the minister; Willie Stevens was considered to be above average in intelligence but perhaps not ‘socially normal.’

INVESTIGATION STALLS, RESTARTS

“The original 1922 investigation yielded no indictments. Continued press speculation, fueled by comments made by a man attempting to divorce one of Mrs. Hall's housekeepers, Louise Geist, led New Jersey governor Arthur Harry Moore to order a second investigation and a trial in 1926.

“The trial began on November 3, 1926, in the Somerset County Courthouse in Somerville, New Jersey, with Charles W. Parker and Frank Cleary presiding as judges. It lasted about 30 days, and garnered huge national attention, largely because of the social status of the wealthy Stevens and Carpenter families. The prosecuting attorney was Alexander Simpson, a state senator. The defense attorneys were also well-connected politicians, and were nicknamed ‘The Million Dollar Defense Team.’

WOMEN ATTACKED BY VICIOUS PRESS

“The prosecution's key witness was Jane Gibson, a pig farmer who lived near the property where the bodies were discovered. The defense portrayed her as uneducated and “crazy,” and attempted to ruin her credibility. The press described her as “the

pig lady.’ Gibson's account of the murders varied widely, differing when told to the police, to newspapers, and at the trial (at which she testified from a hospital bed rolled into the court room). Her personal diary (which was suppressed by the prosecution) contradicted her testimony. Frances Stevens Hall and her two brothers had the motive and the means for the murder, but there was not enough evidence to convict them.” Henry Stevens' was apparently estranged from his sister, and his alibi held up under scrutiny. Henry Carpenter was never tried, and his supposed criminal association in the case therefore never became clear.”

Charlotte Mills, the adolescent daughter of James Mills and Eleanor Mills, came under intense scrutiny during the investigation and trial. Her wit, youth, and resemblance to her mother made her a mock darling of the press, and she became notorious for calling herself a ‘flapper.’ She lived a little longer than her mother, and then died of cancer in a nursing home in Edison, New Jersey. Her funeral took place at Saint John's.

FURTHER READING ON HALL-MILLS

Blood & Ink by Joe Pompeo offers a thrilling new examination of the Hall-Mills double homicide; Pompeo's critically acclaimed new book brings to life the tabloid competition that turned the affair into a media circus. Another interesting (and surprisingly accurate) book is Rick Geary's graphic novel, *In Lover's Lane*. William Kuntzler's *The Minister and the Choir Singer* is the most well-known history of the murders, and closely traces the actual timeline of the investigation; like that investigation, however, it similarly stumbles into strange conclusions (Kuntzler blames the KKK) and seems overwhelmed by the numerous gossipy side-trails. Gerald Tomlinson's *Fatal Tryst* is sober account that lays out plausible theories of the murders. Fans of the *New Yorker* would find that magazine's coverage particularly entertaining. New Jersey historians Marc Mappen and Mary Hartman wrote invaluable essays that assess the extant literature; both authors examined the case from an almost sociological perspective, and their articles serve as excellent introductions to the Hall-Mills case, and the time period in which it occurred.

SPECIAL THANKS

Too many to mention. Love to you all, you incorruptible souls of humanity's twilight.

THOU SHALT NOT Listings Information

Venue The Church of Saint John the Evangelist, 189 George Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901.

Dates Sept 14-Oct 14. **Time** 7:30 pm (2hrs).

Ticket prices \$45 (\$25 concession).

TIX: <https://www.thinkeryandverse.org>. For information, images, and interview availability, please contact Katie Rosin of Kampfire PR, katie@kampfirefilmspr.com.