

[Holl, Verna Grace Van Alstyne]

WOMAN IS BURNED TO DEATH IN EARLY MORNING
EXPLOSION IN HER ST. JOHNSVILLE HOME

Mrs. Verna Holl, 23, Perished While Pouring Oil in Lighted Stove;
Was Alone in Home at Time; Firemen Find Body

ST. JOHNSVILLE—Mrs. Verna Holl, 23, wife of Louis Holl, was burned to death in her home in Averill street at 6 yesterday morning, when a quantity of kerosene she was using to fill either a lighted oil stove or to speed a wood fire in the kitchen range exploded.

Mrs. Holl, whose husband is a night watchman at the State Highway department building at Canajoharie, was alone with her pet dog at the time of the fire, and the lifeless body of the dog was found by investigators huddled near her burned body in the kitchen of the wrecked bungalow. Mrs. Holl was burned beyond recognition, it was reported.

The fire was discovered by Clyde Warn [Warren], who resides near the Holl home. He turned in an alarm and when Fire Chief Edward Miller and members of the department reached the scene, the interior of the dwelling was an inferno. Both doors of the dwelling were locked, and the chief was obliged to force one. Terrific heat and fumes halted the firemen on their first attempt to gain entrance to the blazing structure. The firemen were unaware that there was anyone in the dwelling until the fire was extinguished, and they were able to inspect the ruined interior. It was then they came upon the fire-blackened bodies of Mrs. Holl and her dog.

Blast Started Fire

Sheriff Gerald K. Nellis of Montgomery county, and other investigators were notified of the fire and came to the scene. In reconstructing details of the tragedy, Sheriff Nellis is of the opinion that Mrs. Holl had attempted to fill the reservoir of the oil stove from a can of kerosene after she had lighted two of the burners, for two of the burners were found to have been turned on, judging from the position of the wicks.

The theory was also advanced that Mrs. Holl might have tried to pour kerosene in the kitchen range. The heat of the fire was so intense that it fused the metal parts of a clock in the kitchen.

The shattered oil can was found in the kitchen, indicating the force of the explosion when fumes united. It is believed that the force of the explosion hurled the kerosene over Mrs. Holl and about the kitchen, which accounted for the rapid spread of the flames.

The body of Mrs. Holl was found lying near the kitchen door, and was either thrown there by the explosion, or she had made an attempt to flee. The key to the door was found on the kitchen table. The water faucet in the kitchen sink was turned on.

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Autopsy, Inquest Omitted

Mr. Holl, who was notified immediately of the fire, arrived at St. Johnsville about 7:45. He was severely shocked by the tragic death of his wife.

Coroner Howard Crosby of Fultonville was notified and assisted in the investigation. Due to the condition of the body and the absence of any witnesses, it was learned last night that an autopsy would not be performed and that an inquest would not be held. The body was taken to the Newitt funeral home in Little Falls yesterday afternoon.

Others who assisted in the investigation of the fire were County Investigator William Green of Fonda, who is attached to the office of Sheriff Nellis, Sergeant Grayford Smith of the Fonda trooper barracks, Chief of Police Raymond Walrath of St. Johnsville and Officer Robert Perry of St. Johnsville.

Funeral Tomorrow

Mrs. Holl was the daughter of John and Grace Van Alstyne of East Herkimer. Mr. Van Alstyne, who arrived at St. Johnsville later in the morning, said that he had been at his daughter's home Wednesday night about 10. Mrs. Holl was born at Little Falls on September 10, 1916.

Mrs. Holl is survived by her husband; her parents of East Herkimer; two sisters, Mrs. Clinton [Mildred] Sperbeck, Jr., and Mrs. John Healey, both of Little Falls.

Funeral services will be held at 2 P.M. tomorrow at the parents' home in East Herkimer. The Rev. Howard Gilman, pastor of St. Paul's Universalist church of Little Falls, of which Mrs. Holl was a member, will officiate. Burial will be made in Little Falls.

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Transcribed on 22 May 2013 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY