

It was a lovely spring day. The weather was fair and in the upper fifties on Sunday, May 16, 1937 as sixteen year-old May Savage of Brookhaven Hamlet was walking through the woods near her home about 100 feet east of Yaphank Avenue [this section now generally known as Old Stump Road]. But her pleasant afternoon was shattered when about 2:50 pm she discovered the body of a young girl whose throat had been cut and whose body burned.

Thus began an episode that brought to Brookhaven Hamlet notoriety that was front page headlines in newspapers across the country.

While the news stories appeared in many national newspapers and were carried by the wire services, the accounts here are mostly transcribed from local community newspapers. They were selected to “tell the story” from a more local community perspective.

GIRL SLAIN IN WOOD AND BODY BURNED; BOY FOUND KNIFED

7-year-old Victim and Brother, 3, Are Discovered Close to the Montauk Highway

PARENTS HUNTED IN BRUSH

Death is Feared as Child Tells of Family Ride and Attack by Mysterious “Joe”

New York Times, May 17, 1937

BROOKHAVEN, L.I., May 16—The body of a 7-year old girl whose throat had been cut and whose body had been burned in an unsuccessful effort to destroy it was found this afternoon by a young couple wandering in the woods 100 yards east of this village and barely 175 feet north [some say it was south] of the heavily traveled Montauk Highway.

An hour and a half later one of the scores of officials and volunteer investigators searching the neighborhood stumbled across the body of a 3-year-old boy in a dense thicket about 135 feet from the little girl’s body. There was a 4-inch gash in his throat and at first glances he seemed to be dead.

But when the discoverer, Richard Strattnr of the Suffolk County District Attorney’s office, cried out, the boy sat up and stared at him. He was rushed immediately to the Fay Avenue Hospital in Patchogue, eight miles west of here, where it was said late tonight that he had a good chance of recovery.

Death of Parents Feared

Patiently and gently the authorities tried to question the boy, but the little information he was able to give only heightened the mystery and seemed to indicate that his mother and possibly his father had also been slain somewhere in the woods.

“My name is Jimmy,” he told his questioners repeatedly. When they impressed on him the importance of telling his last name he mumbled something indistinct that sounded as if it might be Kean, Keenan or Kiernan. He said that he had had a sister Helen, who presumably was the slain child.

Jimmy had been out riding with “mamma, daddy and Joe,” the investigators learned from his confused, rambling remarks, and when they asked him who had hurt him he replied “Joe did, and he hurt mamma, too.” He muttered something to the effect that the mysterious “Joe” had brought them ice cream and then he suddenly said: “Mamma is in the woods yet.”

As soon as he gasped out this information the search of the wood, already being carried on by a dozen Brookhaven policeman, half a dozen Sheriff’s deputies, as many investigators from the District Attorney’s office, and two State troopers, was intensified. Scores of volunteers joined the hunt, which was still going on late tonight.

Stained Knife Found

About 140 feet northeast of the boy’s body the searchers discovered late in the afternoon a bread knife with a bloodstained blade, and a small pair of scissors, which also bore crimson stains.

They later discovered a bottle about one-fourth full of gasoline, some seventy-five feet from the little girl’s body. The label of the bottle showed that it had formerly contained “Chlorox,” a patent cleaning preparation.

Within a radius of thirty-five feet from the spot where the girl’s body was discovered the searchers found three different places where the dense underbrush had been fired. However, it was so green, and was so damp from the heavy rain last, that the fires had soon gone out.

The little girl’s body was badly blistered across the shoulders, along the back and down the legs, but when she was found she was lying on her stomach. Her hands were lacerated as if she had dragged herself from the flames by grasping the underbrush. She also had lacerations over her eyes and at the back of her head.

She had been dead about eight or ten hours, in the opinion of medical men who viewed the body late this afternoon. They expressed the belief that the 4-inch wound in Jimmy’s throat had been inflicted about the same time, but by a miracle of good fortune none of the important veins was severed.

Both children had blond hair and blue eyes, those who saw them said, and their clothing was of good quality. The boy wore a sailor suit with a black top and blue trousers. The girl had on a pink dress. Her hair was bobbed to a medium length.

Couple Discover Body

The girl’s body was found at 2:50 P. M. by Miss May Savage of Brookhaven and Warren Brady of Hewlett Avenue, East Patchogue. who were walking together in the woods about 100 yards east of Yaphank Avenue. They immediately notified the Brookhaven town police.

Chief of Police Edward N. Bridge and a squad of men hurried to the scene and Dr. Perry Hohenstein of Bellport was summoned. Within an hour members of the staffs of District Attorney L. Barron Hill and Sheriff William B. McCollom and two State troopers from the Bay Shore barracks joined the search.

Strattnr found Jimmy about 4:30 P. M. and Dr. Hohenstein immediately rushed him to the hospital at Patchogue. The lad’s knees had

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Policeman in the second row has been identified as Brookhaven Town officer and Brookhaven hamlet resident Arthur Waldron. Photo courtesy of David Eastburn

Horrible Ordeal For Brookhaven Girl Finding Victim

Mid-Island Mail, 19 May 1937

An experience horrible beyond words to describe was that of Miss May Savage, the 16-year-old Brookhaven girl who accidentally found the body of the murdered little Helen Tiernan in the woods at Brookhaven Sunday afternoon.

Miss Savage went into the woods alone to pick violets to take to her teacher in Bellport High School and was following a path a short distance east of Yaphank avenue and roughly parallel with it when she encountered the body, with clothes partly burned off and arms upraised.

Faint with terror she quickly turned and ran back to her home.

“There I found a friend, Warren Brady, waiting for me” she said, “and when I told him what I had seen he said I must be mistaken.”

The young man thought she must have seen some animal’s carcass.

She led him to the spot, remaining some distance away while Brady went forward, and after a close glance he confirmed her observation, and satisfied himself the girl was dead. Then they hurried back to the Savage home, got into Brady’s car and rode to Bellport to give the alarm.

Yesterday Miss Savage reluctantly took officers over the ground and showed them how the discovery was made.



Miss Mae Savage, *New York Daily News*, 20 Jan 1938

Killer Trapped Herself Trying To Head Off Quiz Told Nursery Children Were With Brother Supervisor of N. Y. Institution Recognized Boy's Picture in Paper and Notified City Police

The Mid-IslandPress, 19 May 2009

The prompt arrest Monday of Mrs Helen Tiernan, young New York widow, charged with the murder of her little daughter Helen and attempted murder of her young son James in the woods at Brookhaven, came about, apparently, through her own anxiety to head off inquiries which she feared would be made in New York.

Supposing that the management of the day nursery where she took the children while she went to work might start an inquiry or suspect some connection with the murder on reading the newspapers, she went to the nursery with a story of having taken the children away for a stay with relatives.

The institution is the West Side Nursery, 468 West 43rd street, Manhattan, of which Mrs. Emma H. McGowan is superintendent. After Mrs. Tiernan had told the superintendent that she was leaving her boy and girl with her brother, Albert Smith, in Berbenfield, N. J., Mrs McGowan notified the police of her suspicions. She had seen in a newspaper the pictures of the boy who survived the horrible assault, and she made up her mind it was that of Mrs. Tiernan's child.

First Accused Strange Man

Mrs. Tiernan was then taken by city police to the West 47th street station for questioning where, police say, she at first told a story of taking the children on a picnic in the country, where they were beaten and slashed by a strange man.

However, the police point out, she had previously made no report of the incident, and did not tell this story until after a detective took her in.

During her examination by the police Mrs. McGowan, the superintendent of the nursery, and William Schneider, who is superintendent of the apartment house in which Mrs. Tiernan lived at 525 West 47th street, were brought to the station for questioning. Also, another man, whose name was not given out, was brought there, and on learning of several disclosures, the victims' mother broke down and confessed, the police say.

It is doubtful, however, if the woman would have admitted the crime then if she had not been informed that the boy had lived and told investigators here that she attacked him and his sister.

Admits Son's Story

They told her little James had said she took them on the train to the country and was met there by a man in a shiny blue car. There seems to be some confusion as to whether he was talking about a car on this end of the trip or before they left New York.

On hearing this Mrs. Tiernan said, without apparent excitement, "Everything Jimmy says is true—almost everything, anyhow. I had to get rid of them. They were in the way."

She then went on to tell of her love for "George Christy" which is supposed to be the abbreviation of a Greek name. She said he had more or less lived with her in her apartment, even slept in the one bed with her and the two children, whom she had taught to call Christy their father.

Schneider told the police Mrs. Tiernan received a call from a man Saturday afternoon on his telephone and that the man drove up in a car and took her and the two children away with him.

Further information about the little household came from Catherine McCann, a girl of 17, living across the street from Mrs. Tiernan, who said she had from time to time been employed to take care of the children when Mrs. Tiernan was out, especially week-ends. This girl said Mrs. Tiernan's husband died three years ago. Miss McCann said she herself was very fond of the children and that Mrs. Tiernan "was a wonderful woman and loved them so."

Man Visited Frequently

She also told of a tall, dark man frequently visiting Mrs. Tiernan, and said this man, who lived farther up in the city, gave his occupation as a boxer, or a bouncer.

The McCann girl said she last saw Mrs. Tiernan Friday afternoon—the day when she was generally told if she would be needed to to look after the children—and this time "I was not told to come

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Grandfather Is Lone Mourner at Funeral [for] Child Murder Victim

Patchogue Advance, 21 May 1937

Her grandfather, George Smith, an unemployed machinist from New York, was the only mourner at the simple funeral services held here late Wednesday afternoon for seven-year-old Helen Tiernan, whose murdered body was found in the Brookhaven woods Sunday afternoon.

The services, hurriedly arranged, took place at Ruland's Funeral chapel on North Ocean avenue. The Rev. Carl G. Gernannt, pastor of Emanuel Lutheran church, officiated.

One wreath of flowers was the only decoration about the small coffin.

Assistant District Attorney Joseph Arata, several police officers and a few newspapermen followed the coffin to Lakeview cemetery, where the interment was made.

A few short prayers were spoken at the graveside by Mr. Gernannt and the coffin was lowered. As the old grandfather plucked a white carnation from the wreath to toss into the grave, several camera flashlights went off.

Several hours earlier, Mr. Smith had visited his daughter, Mrs. Helen Tiernan, in her cell at Riverhead, where she is held on a murder charge.

Mrs. Tiernan Sends Flowers for Her Murdered Child

Suffolk County News (Sayville) 21 May 1937

Mrs. Helen Tiernan's amazing stolidity first began to crack on Wednesday when C. W. Ruland, Patchogue undertaker, called to inquire about funeral arrangements for her murdered daughter.

That was in the morning. Mrs. Tiernan, after a restful night, became hysterical and wept for some time before she was able to direct the undertaker to give the child "a nice funeral" with plenty of flowers, even if the coffin was inexpensive. The plans were made and Helen's funeral was held Wednesday afternoon.

A blue blanket of delphiniums covered the coffin, sent by the mother. Mrs. Tiernan had asked that a clergyman conduct the service and the Rev. Carl Gernannt, pastor of the Lutheran Church, of Patchogue, read the service. The only mourner was the child's grandfather, George Smith, 63 years old, of New York, Mrs. Tiernan's father. Burial was in Lakeview Cemetery, Patchogue.

According to the undertaker, Mrs. Tiernan paid for the funeral flowers, coffin and all. She had life insurance policies on both the children.

Occasionally, according to Mrs. W. C. McCollom, jail matron, Mrs. Tiernan murmured: "I'll probably have to go to the electric chair for this." Her father came to see her after the funeral and asked her, Mrs. ScCollom said "Why did you do it?" Her reply was, "I must have been crazy."

Christodulus was held in \$50,000 bail as a material witness by County Judge Richard W. Hawkins on Wednesday.

District Attorney Hill said he would probably begin to present the case to the Grand Jury on Monday, and that he would seek to bring the woman to trial in June.

So perfect a noose of evidence has been drawn about Mrs. Tiernan's neck that a plea of insanity is the only loophole left, and that will no doubt be seized upon by the defense. Her mother was for five years a patient in Central Islip State Hospital, and that fact will no doubt be made much of by the defense, as well as her unbelievable conduct in going on a gay beach party the afternoon following the crime. However, none of the authorities and officers who have come in contact with Mrs. Tiernan believe she is insane.

Miss Arate Finds Being Matron a Tough Job

Suffolk County News (Sayville, N. Y.) 21 May 1937

Catharine Arata, who went to New York with officers from then Sayville District Attorney's office on Monday to act as matron following the apprehension of Mrs. Helen Tiernan on a charge of murder, had a pretty difficult assignment.

Swarms of people milled about the confessed murderess in the city, and in trying to get at her, were not particular whether they grapped Mrs. Tiernan or Miss Arata. The also hurled all kinds of epithets at the woman and some even spat at her.

Mrs Tiernan was finally brought out to Sayville on Tuesday and then was taken to Patchogue where hundreds of persons awaited her arrival at the Brookhaven Town Hall. There they contented themselves with a verbal assault on the woman.

Grand Jury Gets Murder of Child Case on Tuesday

Mrs. Tiernan Sole Defendant, Christy Cleared But Man is Held as Material Witness—Mother of Victim Recants Story Involving Her Lover

Patchogue Advance, 21 May 1937

The first degree murder charge against Mrs. Helen Tiernan of New York, who is being held without bail in the county jail, will go before the grand jury at Riverhead on Tuesday as the next step in Brookhaven's tragedy of last weekend.

Meanwhile, George Christopoulos, restaurant worker and ex-boxer, of whom Mrs. Tiernan is on record as saying she wanted to get rid of her two children to make room for him in her New York flat, is locked in another part of the jail as a material witness, unable to raise \$50,000 bail set for him Wednesday morning.

Christopoulos Not at Scene

Apparently accepting Mrs. Tiernan's most recent statement, made at Sayville Tuesday afternoon, District Attorney L. Barron Hill said Tuesday he was "satisfied Christopoulos had no part in the crime." This decision was reached only after town and county investigators had carefully checked the ex-boxer's movements throughout Saturday. Twenty-seven men employed in the same restaurant with Christopoulos substantiated his alibi, Assistant District Attorney Joseph S. Arata said.

Four new witnesses, all Brookhaven residents, yesterday visited the jail and according to police, identified the 28-year-old mother as the woman they had seen in Brookhaven station of the Long Island railroad last Saturday, the day on which seven-year-old Helen Tiernan was murdered and her five-year-old brother was butchered.

Joseph Kearney, who carries the mail between the railroad station and postoffice in Brookhaven, told Assistant District Attorney Joseph S. Arata of Sayville, police said, that Mrs. Tiernan was the woman he had seen in the station building from 2:20 p.m. Saturday until she boarded the 4:25 p. m. train bound for New York.

At the time, Mr. Kearney said she was alone. Mrs. Tiernan, who has shown no effort to disentangle herself from the maze of evidence being woven around her, told Mr. Arata she remembered having seen Mr.

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Little Jimmy, Escaping Murder, Brightens Up With Many Favors

Patchogue Advance, 21 May 1937

Suddenly thrown into the world-wide news, the victim of a revolting crime, five-year-old Jimmy Tiernan is now having the time of his young life, which he desperately fought to save more than 24 hours in the Brookhaven woods over Saturday night.

As he sits up in his bed on the second floor of the Community hospital on Bay avenue greeting visitors—and there are many—Jimmy shows a personality that far outshines the bright neon light just outside his bedroom window.

Those who have seen Jimmy for any length of time readily agree with Miss Margaret O'Connor, hospital superintendent, who describes him as "well mannered, and disciplined."

Traces of the pain he endured while trying to crawl out of the woods after being hammered and slashed are fast disappearing. The hundred of scratches on his hands, arms, feet and legs are healing. The now happy youngster is covered with mercurochrome from his shoulders up to his toe tips to ward off any infection to the many scratches.

There is also the bandaged slit across his little throat, the brain



Photograph from *Mid-Island Mail*, 19 May 1937

Mrs. Tiernam, Alleged Killer Of Her Child, to Go on Trial In Supreme Court on June 14

Justice McCooley Assigns Former Justice Vunk for Defense After Prompt Indictment

Denies Motion of District Attorney Hill for Transfer Into County Court—Examination of Boy Who was Survived Murderous Attack Shows He was Struck With Weapon Several Times

Patchogue Advance, 28 May, 1937

With former Supreme Court Justice John R. Vunk of Patchogue as her assigned attorney, Mrs. Helen Tiernan, accused as the confessed killer of her seven-year-old daughter in the woods at Brookhaven, will go on trial on a first degree murder charge in the Supreme court at Riverhead on June 14.

Supreme Court Justice John H. McCooley yesterday named Mr. Vunk as counsel for Mrs. Tiernan after receiving a grand jury presentment in which the 28-year-old widow was indicted on charges of first degree murder and first degree assault. She had made no move to secure counsel herself, so far as could be learned.

The assault charge is based on her alleged attack on her five-year-old son, James Tiernan, who is still a patient in the Community hospital here [Patchogue, NY].

An examination of the youngster's head after the hair was shaved from it on Wednesday revealed that he had been hit at least six times something, presumably the blunt end of a hatchett, hospital officials said today. One of the blows is believed responsible for the breaking of two of his front teeth.

After the grand jury indictments were handed up on Wednesday, District Attorney L. Barron Hill made a request that the Tiernan case be transferred to the County court for trial, but this was denied by Justice McCooley.



Photograph from *Mid-Island Mail*, 19 May 1937

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concussion and a large sore on the back of his right leg, the result of an insect bite received while he lay overnight in the dense brush.

Unimpaired, though, are the two little blue eyes that light up whenever Jimmy sees fit to smile at his visitors. It is a cute smile in which he holds his lips together, hiding a broken tooth in front.

Toys, books, flowers are being showered upon Jimmy. He's made a "hit" in his first public appearance. A New York newspaper started a fund that is to be placed in trust for his education. Several offers of adoption have been received, but no action has been taken on them.

Having lost his father, sister, and now, probably his mother, Jimmy has come "out of the valley of death" to a new life.

His ambition, he says, is to be a "candy man." He seems to get the most out of the toys that have been sent him, particularly the Tinkertoy with its many long round sticks and axle-like fittings. The toy was sent to him by David Robinson of Patchogue. Several Patchogue merchants, who requested that their names be withheld, also sent him toys and books.

In answer to questions put to him by newspapermen, Jimmy says he would like most of all "a fire truck big enough to sit in."

May Savage, 16-year-old school pupil, who discovered the body of Helen Tiernan on Sunday, visited Jimmy the other day. She was accompanied by Warren Brady of East Patchogue, the second person to view the horrible sight.

Jimmy's condition is steadily improving. Yesterday, he was found sitting at the opposite end of the bed from his pillow. He has become a paradox to the hospital nurses, because while it is only five days ago that he was placed in bed at the end of a 90-mile-an-hour trip to save his life,

Mrs. Tiernan Guilty, 2nd Degree

Mother-child Murder Case Ends on Reduced Charge, No Defense

Will Be Sentenced on Monday—20 Years to Life Term

Patchogue Advance, 18 June 1937

The first degree murder trial of Mrs. Helen Tiernan, 25-year-old New York widow, accused of the slaying of her seven-year-old daughter in a clump of woods at Brookhaven on May 15, came to an abrupt halt in the Suffolk County Supreme Court at Riverhead last evening, when District Attorney L. Barron Hill accepted a plea of guilty to a second degree murder charge.

Mrs. Tiernan was remanded to the county jail until Monday when she will be sentenced by Justice James T. Halliman, who tried the case.

The lesser plea, offered by former Supreme Court Justice John R. Vunk, of Patchogue, defense counsel, when the prosecution rested, came as a surprise. When opening his case Wednesday afternoon, District Attorney Hill had demanded the death penalty. This cannot be imposed on in a second degree murder conviction. The penalty may be 20 years to life imprisonment.

Selection of the jury from among 200 men from all over the county was begun Monday morning and was completed early Wednesday.

The jury comprised the following: Grant Conklin, a Jamesport farmer, foreman; Frank L. Fireman, merchant, North Babylon; Edward E. Kelley, title searcher, Riverhead; Chester Ludwig, chicken farmer, Manorville; Olin Warner, duck farmer, Calverton; Ille, engraver, Sag Harbor; James Roche, retired New York City fireman, Riverhead; William P. Pulholl, engraver, Lindenhurst; August G. Ramm, solicitor, Babylon; Radisow Radiovech, real estate agent, St. James; Kenneth Hedgres, farmer, East Hampton; Elwood Reeve, farmer, Mattituck.

One of the highlights of the trial came on Wednesday afternoon, when George Christodulu, of New York called as a witness by District Attorney Hill, was testifying. Mrs Tiernan kept her eyes on him continually. Christodulu, or Christy, as he is also known, did not look in her direction. He has been referred to her as her sweetheart.

Yesterday afternoon, the state unexpectedly closed its case, after District Attorney L. Barron Hill presented a statement, over defense protests, in which the defendant was quoted as admitting she had plotted to kill her two small children because they were a barrier to er anticipated marriage with Christy, an employee in a New York cafeteria.

After the second degree plea had been accepted, Mr. Hill said he believed that, under the circumstances, the ends of justice would be met, although the prosecution's case had originally on first degree murder, and although he thought Mrs. Tiernan was sane under the laws of the state.

Numerous Witness Called

Other witnesses called Wednesday included Miss May R. Savage, aged 16, of Brookhaven, who found the body of the Tiernan girl in the woods; Warren Brady, aged 18, of East Patchogue, friend of Miss Savage, whom she called to the scene; Bellport Patrolman Charles Rempel; Dr. Perry S. Horenstein of Bellport; Dr. Reidar Trygatadt, pathologist, of Central Islip State Hospital; Coroner Grover A. Silliman of Sayville; John R. Whaley, conductor, and Frank J. Brennan and Matthew Smith, trainmen, of the train on which Mrs. Tiernan and the two children made the trip from New York to Brookhaven.

Mrs. Emma McGall, supervisor of the West Side Day nursery in New York, where Mrs. Tiernan's children were cared for while she was at work; State Trooper Francis Kapesser, who identified a kitchen knife, a pair of shears and a hatchet blade, with which Mrs Tiernan is alleged to have assaulted her daughter, Helen, and her five-year-old son, James; Joseph Kearney, who transports the mail between the railroad station and the post office at Brookhaven, and Harry Warren Beals of Quogue.

Christy, who has been held in county jail since May 18 as a material witness, was asked a few questions while on the stand, principally in connection with his identification of the body of little Helen Tiernan. There was no cross-examination by Mr. Vunk as defense counsel.

Thursday Proceedings

The revolting crime, which shocked the nation, was discovered about 3 o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday, May 16, by Miss Savage while taking a

walk through the Brookhaven woods in search of flowers.

Her discovery of Helen Tiernan's body was reported to town, county and statre police, who swarmed to the scene. During the search of the surrounding area, Richard Stradtner, an investigator on the district attorney's, came across the body of the dead girl's brother, Jimmy Tiernan, aged five.

As Stradtner shouted to his fellow searchers, the youngster sat up. His throat was cut and his head covered with blood. Jimmy was rushed to Community hospital, Patchogue, and has practically recovered.

A solution to the case was seen 18 hours later, when the supervisor of the West Side Day nursery in New York recognized a newspaper picture of Jimmy Tiernan taken at the hospital. Shortly afterward, Mrs. Tiernan called at the nursery and said that the children would no longer be boarded there as she had taken them to relatives in New Jersey.

Woman Took All Blame

Her arrest followed and in her confession she charged that Christy had taken part in the Brookhaven crime. A later confession was made in which she assumed the entire blame, stating she had decided to do away with the children so as to make room in her New York apartment for Christy.

About the time the trial was getting well under under way Wednesday afternoon, Jimmy Tiernan nearing recovery from the wounds he received at Brookhaven, was taken from the hospital for the first time.

Miss Margaret O'Connor, hospital superintendent, drove him to Patchogue's business section, where they made a shopping tour to purchase clothes for the youngster.

James R. Skinner, East Main street insurance agent, escorted Miss O'Connor and Jimmy through the stores.

Jimmy also made a tour of The Advance plant, saw his name set in type on the linotype machine and sat at the machine before leaving the shop.

The headstone for Helen Tiernan's grave bought with funds raised by Patchogue-Plymouth mills employees was set up in Cedar Grove cemetery this week.



Helen Tiernan Blond Widow frolics at the beach with her lover George Christodulus. She went to the beach with him the day after she left her children, one of them dead, in the woods. NY Daily News , 30 Jan. 1938.

Lover Testifies Against Girl at Trial for Life

St. Petersburg Times, June 17, 1937

RIVERHEAD, N. Y., June 16.—(AP)—Appearance on the witness stand of the the man for whose love the state charged she plotted to kill her two children broke for the first time today the passive mien Mrs. Helen Tiernan has displayed since the start of her trial for murder.

The blond widow, who was reported after her arrest to have confessed that she clubbed, stabbed and burned to death her seven-year-old daughter, Helen started up in her chair as George Christodulus, her "boy friend" of a year, was called to testify against her.

In the purported confession Mrs. Tiernan, whose four-year-old son, Jimmy, is recovering from a throat slash received when Helen was slain, said she conceived the idea of ridding herself of the children because her apartment was too small for them and George, whom she once tried to implicate in the slaying but later exonerated.

Christodulus, held as a material witness, testified briefly for the state today that he identified little Helen's body as it lay in the morgue. He will be recalled to the stand, possibly tomorrow.

AN UNCLE MAY ADOPT LITTLE JIMMY TIERNAN

Patchogue Advance, 21 May 1937

The possibility that Jimmy Tiernan will be adopted by his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. John Tiernan of Peconic avenue, Riverhead, was expressed by District Attorney L. Barron Hill, who accompanied the young couple to Community hospital to see the boy yesterday. The uncle, a brother of Jimmy's deceased father, is 24 years old. Placed in an orphanage at the age of five, he was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. James McMaster, now of Riverhead. He is a gas station attendant, married three years, and the couple have no children. Before yesterday's visit Mr. Tiernan said, he had never seen Jimmy. The couple expressed fondness for him. The proposed adoption, through Children's court, could not take place for some time.

MRS. TIERNAN GETS 20 YEARS TO LIFE

Slayer of Daughter, 7, in Long Island Woods Will Serve Term in Bedford Prison

PLEADS TO SEE HER SON

Also Asks Permission to Visit Man for Love of Whom She Said She Planned Crime

New York Times, 22 June 1937

RIVERHEAD, L. I. June 21—Mrs. Helen Tiernan received an indeterminate sentence of twenty years to life imprisonment today, in Suffolk County Supreme Court here for the murder of her 7-year-old daughter, Helen, in the woods near Brookhaven, May 15.

The defendant had entered a surprise plea of guilty to murder in the second degree Thursday night, after the prosecution had closed its case with the reading of a damaging statement in which the 26-year-old blond widow was quoted as confessing she had plotted to kill her two young children because they stood in the way of her anticipated marriage to George Christodulus, a worker in a New York cafeteria.

Mrs. Tiernan was called before the bench and asked if she had anything to say before Justice James T Hallinan imposed sentence. She looked questioningly at her counsel, former Supreme Court Justice John R. Vunk. "Nothing to say," he replied for her.

Mrs. Tiernan, dressed in a smartly cut black linen dress trimmed with white and a black hat, then turned to Mr. Vunk and thanked him in a whisper for his services. Tears welled up in her eyes as she shook his hand, but she quickly brushed them away and started to smile. She seemed in good spirits when she posed for photographers a moment later.

The defendant renewed her plea today to see her 4-year-old son Jimmy before she is removed to the State Prison for Women at Bedford Hills. She is under indictment for attacking the boy at the same time she killed the girl.

Jimmy, having recovered in Patchogue Hospital, is now in the Children's Shelter in New York in custody of the New York City Child Welfare Board. Before his mother can see him, she must receive the permission of the Social Welfare Department of the prison.

Christodulus, who was held in \$50,000 bail as a material witness in the case, will be taken tomorrow from the county by Federal officers to answer to the charge of illegally entering this country. Mrs. Tiernan has requested that she be allowed to say good-bye to him, but it is not believed she will get the opportunity.

Sheriff William C. McCollom said he had notified the warden of the Bedford Hills prison immediately after Mrs. Tiernan was sentenced, and that he expected a prison official would come to Riverhead for her in a day or two.



Mrs. Tiernan after she pleaded guilty to murder in the second degree. NY Daily News, 30 Jan. 1938

MOTHER'S CRIME

Gaol for Murder of Daughter

The Canberra Times, Canberra, Australia

NEW YORK, Monday. Mrs. Helen Tiernan, 25, a widow, was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for 20 years, for the murder her seven-year-old daughter.

The police alleged that the woman killed her daughter by cutting her throat and dragging the body into the brush, and also cutting the throat of her five-year-old son.

It was alleged that she committed the crime because there was no room for the children in the room, which she shared with a man.

Mrs. Tiernan at Women's Prison

New York Times, 24 June 1937

BEDFORD HILLS, N. Y., June 23.—Mrs. Helen Tiernan, sentenced to twenty years to life for the murder of her daughter, entered the State prison for women at the Westfield State Farm, near here, at 5:15 P. M. today. She arrived in an automobile and was accompanied by a matron. Before leaving the Suffolk County jail the prisoner requested that \$280 remaining from an insurance policy she carried on her murdered daughter be turned over to the Community Hospital, Patchogue, where he son, James 4, was treated for the murder. The child now is in the custody of the Child Welfare Board in New York.

Hospital Has Not Been Paid for Jimmy Tiernan

Suffolk County News (Sayville, N. Y.). 24 September 1937

Miss Margaret O'Connor, who conducts the Community Hospital in Patchogue, has retained a lawyer to bring suit to collect the hospital bill incurred by Jimmy Tirman, although the defendant in the proposed suit has not yet been decided. Miss O'Connor said that following the murder of Helen Tiernan by her mother, the little boy spent six weeks in the hospital during which time he had a private room, medicines and night and day care.

She said not one cent has yet been collected toward the bill on the injured child, which totaled \$290, contrary to a report that the hospital received from \$1,500 to \$2,000 from the county in the Tiernan case. A \$15,000 fund was raised by a New York newspaper for the little boy who narrowly escaped his sister's fate.

Girl Slain in Wood and Body Burned; Boy Found Knifed

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been scraped, as if he had been dragged or had crawled through the underbrush, and he had two bumps on his head. The wound on his throat was not deep.

The little girl's body was taken to the undertaking establishment of C. W. Ruland Sons at Patchogue, where Coroner Grover A. Stillman will perform an autopsy. A preliminary examination showed no indication of a criminal assault. Her face was black, however, leading some of those who saw her to suspect she had been strangled. The cut on her throat was deeper than that on the boy's, and ran from the right side to the center of the throat.

Some of the searchers reported late tonight the finding of a blood-stained hatchet head, a blood-stained rag and an empty cracker box about half a mile from the spot where the girl's body was found. Inasmuch as not a great deal of blood was found under either body, the investigators thought it possible that the children's wounds had been inflicted elsewhere.

Fifty Boy Scouts equipped with searchlights joined the police and other investigators searching the woods surrounding the scene tonight. The wooded area is about a third of a mile wide and a mile long, and is just south [north] of a number of duck farms. A road to one of these farms runs within twenty-five feet of the spot where the girl was found, but it is hardly more than two wagon ruts.

Two bloodhounds were rushed here by motor late tonight from the State police barracks at Hawthorne, N. Y., to assist in the search.

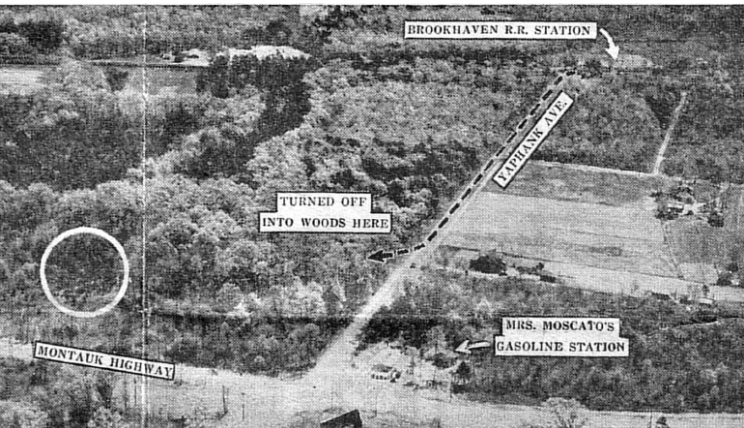
The State police sent out tonight over the teletype system linking New York and seven near-by States an appeal for information about the disappearance of any family with children the ages of those who were found.

District Attorney Hill said tonight that the murderer apparently believed that both children were dead, and that he saturated the clothing of both with gasoline, covering them with leaves and brush, and set fire to them. The fires went out, however, the little girl crawled a short distance away, and the boy to the spot where he was found, according to Mr. Hill's theory.

Otis Barnes, a deputy sheriff taking part in the investigation, said tonight that a storekeeper living near the Long Island Railroad station here had seen a woman, accompanied by a boy and a girl about the ages of the victims, get off an eastbound train Saturday morning. The storekeeper said that the woman returned alone later in the day and boarded a train, also eastbound.

Another report reached the police from a woman at a gasoline station not far from the place where the youngsters were found, to the effect that on Saturday morning she saw a woman leading a small boy and a girl along Yaphank Avenue. They came back to the highway a little later, she said, and then disappeared into the woods.

Many motorists along the Montauk Highway, which is an extension of the Merrick Road, saw the activities at the scene of the discovery of the body and halted their cars to learn what had happened. As scores of them remained to aid in the search, the highway, always well filled on a Sunday, became badly congested.



Air View of the Murder Scene

After leaving the rail road station, Mrs. Tiernan guided her children along Yaphank avenue, then turned off into the woods. Mrs. Theresa Moscato, operator of a gasoline station, reported seeing them. Little Helen and her brother were attacked in the area circled on the picture. [Picture looking south. Intersection was historically known as "Snow's Corner."]

New York Daily News, 30 Jan 1938.

Lace Mill People Buy a Headstone for Tiernan Girl

Advance, 4 June 1937

The grave of seven-year old Helen Tiernan, victim of the recent murder tragedy at Brookhaven, in Lake View cemetery, Patchogue [NY], will be marked by a neat white marble headstone for which funds have been subscribed by the numerous employees, men and women, of the local lace plant of the Patchogue-Plymouth mills.



Click for enlarged view and cemetery information

A committee of the mill employees completed arrangements yesterday for laying a stone suitably inscribed and placed on the grave, which adjoins the lace mill premises on the west and is in view of many in the mill. The stone will bear simply the name of the little girl, the date of her death and her age. There will be nothing to indicate anything other than an ordinary child's grave.

It is expected the stone will be placed within about a week. The fund raised exceeds somewhat the amount required for the stone and arrangements will be made to expend this on upkeep of the lot. The money was raised by a number of mill employees who felt the common impulse to do something out of respect to the little girl victim and met with immediate and general response from everybody approached in the plant.

Killer Trapped Herself Trying To Head Off Quiz

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Saturday.”

The apartment occupied by the Tiernans consisted of three rooms, renting for \$5 a week, and lately she had been leaving the children at the nursery while she went to work in a dress factory.

According to the alleged confession Mrs. Tiernan was in love with Christy and they wanted to be married but he objected to the lack of space for a family in those rooms and the expense of providing otherwise for the children.

Why she went to Brookhaven is a question still under investigation. According to her confession she attacked the children alone but her little son is quoted at the hospital here as saying—in speech halted by weakness and injuries including broken teeth—that his mother took him and his sister on a long ride in a train and then got into a car—”George’s.”

Had “Two Fathers”

Earlier versions were that he murmured “Joe did it. Mommie got hurt too.” Later versions indicated he said his mother hit him and Helen while they were picking flowers. He also in mumbling names mentioned “Chris” and seemed confused on questions about father. The man who met the party was one of “two fathers” and “he liked George best.”

Mrs. Tiernam to Go on Trial In Supreme Court on June 14

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When Justice McCooey asked the reason for the request, District Attorney Hill replied, “It has been the custom which has been followed for years,” said Mr. Hill. “It was done, I understand, to relieve the Supreme court of trying criminal cases.”

During the last eight years or more, all of Suffolk’s first degree murder trials, with the exception of one or two, have been held before the county court. Formerly it was the custom to move other criminal cases into the County court and leave murder cases in the Supreme court.

When Mrs Tiernan was brought into the Supreme Court chambers late Wednesday, she stood for several minutes while photographers snapped pictures from all angles, then fell to the floor in a faint. She was revived by Miss Lenora Field, supervising health nurse, and brought before Justice McCooey.

After pleas of not guilty to both charges had been entered on her behalf, Mrs. Tiernan was returned to the jail to await trial.

Still unable to raise \$50,000 bail, George Christopoulos, Mrs. Tiernan’s lover, who is being held as a material witness to the murder case, is also at the jail.

Grand Jury Gets Murder of Child Case on Tuesday

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Kearney at the station.

The other witnesses taken to Riverhead were Sophie Kuzmech, aged 12, Theresa Poletanski, aged eight, and her sister Frances, aged seven, all of Brookhaven, who told Mr. Arata, He says, they had also seen Mrs. Tiernan at the station in the afternoon.

Mrs. Tiernan told Mr. Arata she recalled seeing the three little girls at the station, but that she did not remember what they looked like.

Quogue Man Offered Them Ride

Another witness, Harry Warren Beals, a village trustee of Quogue, came forward Wednesday to identify Mrs. Tiernan as the woman seen walking with two children north on Yaphank road, about 300 feet north of Montauk highway, Brookhaven, before noon Saturday.

Mr. Beals was sought by the authorities after five-year-old Jimmy Tiernan had repeatedly told of a green car that had stopped on the road near the woods.

Having read of this in the newspapers, Mr. Beals voluntarily went to Riverhead and told Mr. Hill of driving north on Yaphank avenue with F. A. Ingersoll of Brookline, Mass., as a passenger, when he saw the trio. He passed them, then backed up his car and asked if they wanted a lift, which the woman declined.

Unaware of the story Mr. Beals had told Mr. Hill, Mrs. Tiernan, when confronted with the Quogue official, said, “Aren’t you the man who backed up his car to where we were walking?”

Mrs. Theresa Moscato, owner of a gas station on Yaphank avenue and Montauk highway, whose original account provided one of earliest clues in the case, also visted the jail on Wednesday. After seeing Mrs. Tiernan, however, Mrs. Moscato said she could not give positive identification.

On Sunday, Mrs. Moscato told police she remembered having seen a woman walk up Yaphank avenue Saturday morning with two young children, then walk into the woods, from which she was later seen emerging alone and walking back toward the railroad station.

Boarded at Brookhaven

In the confession she gave at Sayville on Tuesday, Mrs. Tiernan said she first learned of Brookhaven last summer, when she boarded the two children at the Holiday house, a vacation home maintained by a Brooklyn church group.

Mrs. Tiernan and her lover, George Christy or Christopoulos, were brought to Suffolk County Tuesday afternoon from New York where they were questioned by District Attorney L. Barron Hill and New York police officials.

The pair were brought to Bay Shore about noon Tuesday, then to the District Attorney’s office in Sayville and finally to the [Brookhaven] Town Hall in Patchogue at about 3 o’clock, where Mrs. Tiernan was arraigned before Justice of the Peace Donald W. Shaw on the first degree murder charge. About 500 people stood about the Town hall when she arrived.

The woman asked to plead guilty but was advised by District Attorney Hill that a person accused of murder cannot plead guilty, so she was asked to plead not guilty. However, she insisted, “But I am guilty.” Finally she did plead not guilty.

Neither she nor the man had any counsel at the time and they asked for none.

Asks Him to Aid Son

Christy was arraigned next and it was during a lull in the proceedings, when Mrs. Tiernan stood next to him, that she was heard to remark, “Will you promise me that you’ll take care of my little boy until he’s 21?” Christy’s answer was not given at the time as Judge Shaw resumed the proceedings.

Mrs. Tiernan was calm throughout the arraignment in Town hall but when the photographers swarmed about her as she stood through Chrsity’s arraignment, she covered her face with a man’s hat she found lying nearby and kept it before her face until she left the courtroom. As she walked to the car that was to take her to Riverhead she hid her face with her coat, and so thoroughly did she have it hid that when she went to enter the car she struck her head on the roof so forcibly she was stunned for a moment.

When first questioned in New York Monday Mrs. Tierney claimed she had brought her children to the country for a picnic and a strang man had attacked them. But when it was pointed out she did not report the incident, and when told that her sone James had lived and had told police his mother had done the act, she admitted it. Later she implicated Christy, saying he had hit the children with an axe while she held them.

But in her final story she claimed she did the brutal act herself, telling police she had involved Christy because she had heard he was married and had been deceiving her all along.