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Pool Tragedy Inquest

The inquiry into the Sunshine Swimming Pool tragedy was held at the City Morgue on Wednesday last, when the building was packed. The bodies of two children Harold George Russell (3 years) and Eric Russell (18 months) were found on Sunday, June 12th, and that of their mother, Jessie Letitia Russell (27), was recovered at the pool on the following Tuesday. On June 24th, the husband of the woman, Harold James Russell (26), mechanic, of Alma street, Maidstone, was charged with the murder of the three victims.

Sub-Inspector F. Deeley and Detective F. W. Sickerdick conducted the case for the Coroner (Mr. D. Grant, P.M.) and Mr. R. H. Dunn appeared for Russell, who was present in court seated behind his counsel.

Dr. W. Smith gave evidence that there were no marks of violence on the bodies.

Henry Thomas Trueman (13), of Kamarooka street, Sunshine, gave evidence as to finding the children floating in the pool.

Constable Jerrett related the incidents connected with the recovery of the bodies and of the subsequent

dragging operations which resulted in the body of the woman and the pram being recovered. He told of interview with Russell and suggested that the children might be his. Accused said "My — kids"

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his. Accused said "My — kids" and started to smoke.

Mounted Constable Boulton said that the woman's body was recovered in 15 feet of water. Russell had denied having been in Sunshine with his wife on the Saturday evening. Later Russell said he had married another woman and intended to make his wife live with them as his married sister. "She is silly enough for anything," he said. Afterwards Russell admitted being on the Ballarat road the evening in question at 8 p.m. looking for his wife. Russell had said to him, when they were in the Sunshine Police Station alone "Do you think I will get my neck stretched for this?" Boulton said "You really did push them in?" Russell replied "No, but I will get the blame for it."

John Heffer, of Ballarat road, Sunshine, father of Mrs. Russell, said he was not on the best terms with accused. His daughter had never made any suggestion of being tired of life.

Mrs. Heffer said she last saw her daughter on the Tuesday previous to the tragedy. She was quite normal. She had assisted her daughter with food and clothing. When she had asked her daughter what had happened to her good wedding ring she had replied "Harry took it to get a smaller one for me." She had remarked "He would do well out of that for this is only a brummy one." Her daughter had not made arrangements to go to her place on the Saturday.

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Saturday.

Robert Keith McDonald, chemist, Sunshine, said Russell had tried to buy poison at his shop on the Friday, but after signing the poison book, did not have enough money for to make the purchase.

Austin Allan, moulder, Sunshine, gave evidence that he met a man on Ballarat road on the Saturday evening, who had asked if he had seen a woman pushing a pram.

Martin Lynch, garage keeper, said accused was at his place on the evening of the 11th June and said he had promised to meet his wife on the road.

John Richards, dairyman, of Couch street, Sunshine, said that accused stopped him on Ballarat road about 7.15 on Saturday, 11th June, and asked if he had seen a woman with a pram.

Noel Skene, Gladys Craddock and Charles Atwell, bus driver, gave evidence that accused stopped the motor bus at Lynch's corner, asking about a woman with pram.

David Adam Buchanan railway porter at Albion gave evidence of a man dressed in a grey coat asking about a woman with a pram at 7.15 on the evening in question.

Reuben Geo. Trickey said that returning from his mate's place at

7.30 he saw a man in Sydney street dressed in grey.
Walter Dixon Russell, a brother of accused, said he met his sister-in-law shortly after 9 p.m. in Sydney street. Sub-Inspector Deeley spent some time in a severe cross-

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spent some time in a severe cross-examination of this witness.

Walter Sawyer, Cowper St., Footscray, told how Russell and Alma Davey had taken rooms at his place.

Florence Alice Mitchell, of Maldstone, an aunt of Alma Davey, told how Russell had been at her place on June 11th and left at 6.15 returning about 10.30. The left arm of his coat was sodden.

Alma Davey (18) of Stark street, Footscray, told how she met Russell and of events leading up to her being "married" to him at Fitzroy. She and Russell had stayed together at Alma street on the Saturday and Sunday. On the Monday night she had heard him saying in his sleep "She's dumped them, she's dumped them." Russell confessed to her on the Tuesday that the children drowned at Sunshine were his and that they thought his wife was in the pool also. Till that time she had not known Russell had been married before. She said "Well, Harry, you must face it like a man, and I will stick to you." She identified the blue coat found in the pool as Russell's. After giving her evidence she had to be assisted from court.

Mary Jane Russell, mother of accused, gave evidence that Ivy Russell had often threatened to take her life, but they had considered she was only joking.

Harold James Russell, father of accused, gave similar evidence.

Senior Constable H. M. R. McDonald said accused stated that the last time he saw his wife alive was at 4 p.m. on Saturday. Accused

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at 4 p.m. on Saturday. Accused made a statement, in which he said that his wife had threatened to commit suicide. Subsequently, at the police office accused asked witness, "Have they got anything on me?"

Detective F. W. S. Sickordick said on 15th June he interviewed accused, who said that he had last seen his wife alive between 3.30 and 4 p.m. on Saturday. Russell accused his wife of having carried on with some man. On 24th June detectives again interviewed Russell. They pointed out that screams had been heard coming from the direction of the creek, and that at 10.30 p.m. accused had arrived at Mrs. Mitchell's house with his clothes wet. Accused eventually declared he had bought poison to kill himself, but had changed his mind. He had met his wife later in the evening of 11th June, and she said she was going to drown herself. Accused tried to dissuade her, but she pushed past him with the pram and the two children. Accused followed, as she walked towards the pond. Again accused tried to dissuade her. He walked away for a few seconds, and when he turned round his wife and the children in the pram had disappeared. Accused then rushed to the pool, and saw his wife and children struggling in the water. He tried to save them, but they were too far out. He stripped and dived in three times, but could not recover the bodies. He then visited Mrs. Mitchell, and whilst on the way fell into a pool and saturated his left arm. He was afraid to call

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left arm. He was afraid to call for help lest he be accused of having drowned his wife and children.

Russell refused to give evidence.

The Coroner (Mr. D. Grant) committed Russell for trial on 15th August on a charge of murder in connection with the drowning of the three victims. Bail was refused.

A letter of sympathy is to be sent from the Braybrook Council to the family of the late Michael Foley who lost his life in the Casino tragedy. He was a ratepayer at Maribyrnong.

A company of Girl Guides has been formed and the girls are making good progress for their Tenderfoot test. When this is completed, it is hoped to enrol more girls from 11 to 16 years of age.

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Jury Disagrees in Sunshine Trial

One of the most sensational trials ever before Victorian Courts and lasting for five days, was concluded last Friday night, when the jury failing to agree, were discharged and a new trial ordered.

Harold James Russell, (26), was charged with having murdered his wife, Jessie Letitia Russell (27), and his two children, Harold George Russell (3 years), and Eric Russell (18 months), at the Sunshine Swimming Pool on June 11. The evidence was similar to that given at the Coroner's court, with an additional Crown witness, who gave evidence of an alleged confession made by Russell in the remand yard at the Metropolitan gaol.

Mr. C. H. Book, crown prosecutor, conducted the case and Dr. Brennan was briefed for the defence.

The jury after considering the case for six hours, returned to say that no agreement was possible, and His Honor, Justice Wasley, thanked and discharged them.

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