

ST. ALBANS TRAGEDY

HUSBAND MURDERED IN BED WIFE FOUND DROWNED

SEQUEL TO MANY QUARRELS

According to stories told to the police by relatives and neighbors fears of domestic unhappiness culminated early on Sunday morning in the death of Alfred Norman O'Neill, 40 years, grover, Theodore Street, St. Albans, and his wife, Rose O'Neill, 30 years.

The first news of the tragedy was received by the Sunshine police from a neighbor, Mr James Hudson, at 7.40 a.m. on Sunday last. Hudson had been awakened by Stanley John O'Neill, brother of the dead man, who had run to his house, 200 yards away, almost speechless from excitement, and had gasped out, "My God, Norm's dead. He's been shot." It was not until more than an hour later that a constable arrived from Sunshine on his bicycle. He found O'Neill's body lying face up, permost on the bed in the front room with a bullet wound in the left temple, the left cheek and the left-hand side of the throat. Death had occurred some hours earlier.

Stanley John O'Neill, who had been staying at the house for about a month, could throw little light on the tragedy. Deceased and his wife had attended a euchre party and dance at St. Albans hall on Saturday night, and were not home when Stanley O'Neill went to bed about 11 p.m. Stanley O'Neill slept throughout the night, awoke between 6 and 7 a.m., milked the cow, and, returning to the house, saw that the front door was open. On the veranda he found a seven chambered .22 calibre revolver which contained three spent shells.

Norman O'Neill who was a drover, was due to leave home at 4 a.m. on Sunday to take a flock of sheep for Mr Thomas, wholesale butcher, of Rockbank, to the Flemington abattoirs. Thinking that Norman had

Rockbank, to the Flemington abattoirs. Thinking that Norman had overslept, Stanley went into the bedroom, called out "haven't you any sheep to take this morning?" and shook his brother slightly. He felt that the body was, as he described it, "nan-cold." He ran up the band, noticed the bullet wounds and realised that his brother was dead. He immediately ran across the paddock to Mr Hudson's home and gave the alarm.

Senior Detective Sickerdick and Detective Ferguson arrived from Kussell Street and began to piece together Mr and Mrs O'Neill's movements. According to neighbors there had been frequent quarrels between the couple during recent years, but they had been on good terms during the last few weeks. On Saturday night O'Neill drove his wife in their car to a euchre party and dance at the St. Albans hall. O'Neill left the dance early, and with a neighbor, Reginald (Charles) Deed and two other men, drove in Deed's car to the dog races at White City. O'Neill returned to the dance about 11.30 p.m. and became involved in an angry scene with his wife outside the hall, in the course of which she threw her hand bag in his face. The couple left the hall shortly before midnight, and on their way home stopped at Deed's house. There the quarrel was resumed. Mrs Deed got Mrs O'Neill into a bedroom while the men folk attempted to pacify O'Neill, who was finally persuaded to have a cup of tea. O'Neill, however, maintained the utmost hostility towards his wife, and repeated statements made to her previously that he had finished with her and would not allow her to sleep again under his roof. O'Neill left for home about 12.15 a.m. and a quarter of an hour later Charles Deed got out his car and drove Mrs O'Neill, who appeared so overcome that she could not walk, to her home. Mrs O'Neill entered the house but was ordered out by her husband and ran out the back door. Charles Deed intercepted her husband, who was following her, pacified him and persuaded him to go

and, who was following her, persuaded him and persuaded him to go to bed. Mrs O'Neill disappeared into the darkness.

The O'Neill family lived in the St. Albans district for half a century. Mrs O'Neill, whose maiden name was Rose Cheel, had been employed as a cook on the estate of Mr Taylor, "Overnewton," Keilor. After a courtship of fourteen years the couple were married ten years ago. They kept a dairy at St. Albans, but sold out five years ago and purchased the property in Theodore Street, where the tragedy occurred. There was no family quarrel developed over Mr O'Neill's visit to an hotel at Keilor. He obtained employment as a driver from Mr Thomas, and also did a considerable amount of horse work.

overwrought and had apparently completely lost control of herself.

About 7 p.m. on Sunday the body of Mrs O'Neill was recovered at the deep end of the council dam, in about 7 feet of water. It was without hat or shoes, and a round piece of iron, about an inch thick, was tied round the neck. The task of the police was rendered difficult by the fact that the bottom of the dam is foul with boxthorn cuttings and there is also several feet of soft mud. After unsuccessful efforts to drag the dam with a rope and a crane a boat was brought from the police depot. At the same time a squad of police recruits was taken from the depot to St. Albans, and formed a cordon round the dam to keep off a crowd of morbid sight-seers.

ing. The police have been informed that he had in his possession for some years a seven-chambered .22 calibre revolver. Subsequent to one of the family quarrels Mrs O'Neill visited her neighbor, Mrs Hutson, showed her the revolver and said she was terrified by her husband's possession of the weapon. Some months ago the revolver disappeared, and it was supposed that Mrs O'Neill had hidden it. After Sunday morning's tragedy neighbors told the detectives that Mrs O'Neill had repeatedly threatened to drown herself in the council dam close to the house. The condition of O'Neill's body would suggest that death took place about 3 a.m. O'Neill had changed into his working clothes, and had apparently lain down to get a few hours' sleep before leaving to pick up his sheep at 4 a.m. Someone had entered the house and shot him in his sleep. Death was apparently instantaneous, for deceased's head was resting in the palm of his right hand and there were no signs of a struggle.

Members of the Deed family describe Mrs O'Neill's condition at midnight on Saturday as pitiable. She was tremendously excited and overwrought and had apparently

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INQUEST PROCEEDINGS

A history of domestic unhappiness was related to the Coroner (Mr Grant, P.M.) when he inquired on Tuesday into the tragedy at St. Albans on March 10.

He found that Alfred Norman O'Neil, 48, drover, of Theodore Street, was murdered by his wife, Rosina Violet O'Neil, who then drowned herself.

Mr J. V. Barry, instructed by Messrs Leach and Thompson, appeared for the relatives of Alfred O'Neil; Mr R. V. Monahan, instructed by Mr J. Barnett, for the relatives of Rosina O'Neil; and Senior Detective F. W. Sickerdick for the police.

Incidents of the couple's unhappiness were given by Stanley John O'Neil, laborer, brother of the dead man, who lived in the house.

About midnight on March 9 he heard voices in their bedroom, and he saw with his brother a man named Deed.

"My brother said, 'I have had an argument with Rose and she gave me a black eye. She threw something at me and I kicked her out,'" said O'Neil.

To this O'Neil replied: "Where is she? You can't do things like that," and his brother said: "I own the house and I won't let her dictate to me."

His brother appeared to be under the influence of liquor.

HEARD THE SHOTS

"During the early hours of the next morning, I was awoken by the dog barking, and I heard a number of sharp reports," said O'Neil. "I took no notice of them, thinking they were caused by a motor car back-firing."

When he rose at about 7 a.m. and walked to the front verandah he saw a loaded revolver on a seat.

He saw his brother on the bed and thought he was asleep; but when he spoke and received no reply he saw the man was dead, and had bullet

marks on the left side of his head.

"I have heard Norman's wife accuse him of going out with other women," said O'Neil. "He would laugh it off and tell her she was cranky. She would get angry and excited, go to her room, close the door and remain there."

"On March 8 I heard an argument between them. It was over a horse Norman had lent to a man at Keilor," O'Neil continued. "Mrs O'Neil said to Norman 'Where are the horses?' He said 'I hired them to the girl Brown and the boy Beck.' She said 'You — liar! You are taking them over to the woman in the pub.'"

NOT VIOLENT

His brother was not a violent tempered man and did not resent the insinuations made by his wife regarding other women. He did not see anything in his brother's conduct to justify the belief he would use a revolver on anyone.

"That was hysteria on his wife's part," said O'Neil.

Reginald Charles Deed, farmer, of St. Albans, was asked by Mrs O'Neil to drive her to her home on March 9.

"When we entered the house Norman O'Neil came out and said to his wife 'You will have to get out. You can't stop here,'" said Deed "Mrs O'Neil was crying and walked towards the back door."

Deed told Mr Monahan that when he drove Mrs O'Neil to her home she was very excited and wished to apologise to her husband.

POLICE EVIDENCE

Detective W. R. Ferguson told of dragging a waterhole near the deceased's home, where police found the body of Rosina O'Neil. Tied to her neck was a rope attached to a heavy pump. There were no signs of violence.

He searched the house and found a number of notebooks and papers in the handwriting of Rosina O'Neil. These showed a long history of domestic unhappiness.

Detective H. Perkins, of the Fin-

Detective H. Perkins, of the Finger Print Branch, said the finger print on the pistol grip was identical with the right index finger of Rosina O'Neil, and the print on the barrel was identical with that of Stanley John O'Neil's left ring finger.

The official police photographer, Detective F. Hobley, said the prints of Stanley John O'Neil were underneath the barrel, and certainly not in a shooting position.

Dr Crawford Mollison, Government pathologist, said Rosina O'Neil died from drowning, and Alfred Norman O'Neil from a bullet wound in the brain.

Things have come
To such a pass
I can use my bags
As a shaving glass.