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FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
WASHINGTON D. C.

To: Mr. J. R. Ketchart
Chief of Police
St. Petersburg, Florida

July 31, 1951

There follows the report of the FBI Laboratory on the examination of evidence received from your department.

This examination has been made with the understanding that the evidence is connected with an official investigation of a criminal matter and that the Laboratory report will be used for official purposes only, related to the investigation or a subsequent criminal prosecution. Authorization cannot be granted for the use of the Laboratory report in connection with a civil proceeding.

J. Edgar Hoover
John Edgar Hoover, Director

Re: Mrs. MARY MARIE REBER, Deceased
Burned to Death in Apartment
1200 Cherry Street

YOUR FILE NO.

FBI FILE NO.

RECORDED #06 95-42292-1
PC-30584 CC

Examination requested by: Addressess

EX-62

Reference: Letter dated July 7, 1951

Examination requested: Chemical Analyses - Miscellaneous - Microscopic Analyses

Specimens:

- Q1 Glass fragments found in ashes
- Q2 Six small objects believed to be teeth
- Q3 Metal from near body
- Q4 Fibers believed to be part of nightgown
- Q5 Particles of bones found in ashes
- Q6 Charred fabric believed to be from chair
- Q7 Cotton material from chair
- Q8 Charred wood
- Q9 Charred legs from end table
- Q10 Charred fabric from rug
- Q11 Unburned section of rug, heavily soaked with greasy substance
- Q12 Remainder of ashes
- Q13 Shoe from foot not consumed by fire
- Q14 Chair springs

Mr. Tolson.....
 Mr. Ladd.....
 Mr. Clegg.....
 Mr. Glavin.....
 Mr. Nichols.....
 Mr. Rosen.....
 Mr. Tracy.....
 Mr. Harbo.....
 Mr. Mohr.....
 Tele. Room.....
 Mr. Nease.....
 Miss Gandy.....

Enclosure

1-Miami
JLG:emh

MAILED 10
AUG 1 1951
COMM. 101

86 AUG 6 1951

RECEIVED
FBI
DEPT OF JUSTICE

RECEIVED-NVH 100W
E B I
JUL 31 11 35 AM '51

(continued next page)

RESULTS OF EXAMINATION:

An examination of specimens ^{the} (Q1 through Q14) showed the presence of no oxidizing chemicals, petroleum hydrocarbons or other volatile fluids commonly used as accelerants, or any chemical substances used to initiate or accelerate combustion. The greasy substance which saturated several of these specimens (such as Q11 and Q13) was found to be human fat. The absence of any traces of volatile inflammable fluids does not preclude, of course, the possibility that such fluids were used in destroying the body of the deceased. Because of their very nature, gasoline, ether, and similar inflammable fluids are consumed ordinarily in the early stages of a fire. Where there has been almost complete combustion, as in this case, it would be most unlikely to find such fluids even though they had been present at the beginning of the fire.

As regards the destruction of the deceased's body which occurred in this case it is entirely possible that the body was consumed to the extent shown in the photographs and as indicated by the bone fragments and other debris without the aid of any such material as gasoline. It is not generally realized the extent to which the human body can burn once it becomes ignited. While such cases are not common, there are on record numerous instances of bodies burning with almost complete destruction. It was formerly believed that such cases arose from spontaneous combustion or the burning was sometimes attributed to preternatural causes. There is, however, absolutely no evidence from any of the cases on record to show that burning of this nature occurs other than when the body is ignited by some external means. The unusual aspects of such cases of burning have been heightened by the fact that in many instances little damage from burning occurred in the room or area directly surrounding the victim. As in this case, the remains of the victim were found reclining in the wreckage of a chair, sofa, bed or in one instance sitting on a stairway. In the last-named case the victim was a woman who had been clad in rather voluminous garments. Not a vestige of clothing was found remaining in that case although no extensive damage was done to the stairs.

As indicated above, these cases are explained by the fact that the body becomes ignited from some outside cause such as burning clothing, a burning mattress, chair or other means. Once the body starts to burn there is enough fat and other inflammable substances to permit varying amounts of destruction to take place. Sometimes this destruction by burning will proceed to a degree which results in almost complete combustion of the body.

In this case, the absence of any scorching or damage to furniture in the room can only be explained by the fact that heat liberated by the burning body had a tendency to rise and formed a layer of hot air which never came in contact with the furnishings on a lower level. This situation would have occurred particularly if the fire had smoldered rather than burned freely.

The distorted pieces of glass in specimen Q1 were found to soften in the vicinity of 1000 to 1100 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature corresponds to a bright red heat.

All of the objects in specimen Q2 are the remains of human teeth with the exception of one object which appeared to be an artificial tooth or part of a denture.

The composition of specimen Q3 does not indicate that this specimen is from a lead storage battery. A portion of a cigarette lighter was found in specimen Q3 and the remaining metal in this specimen could also be from a lighter. The melted metal in specimen Q3 corresponded in composition to white metal. In this connection white metal could be used as the case for a hearing aid. No portions of a battery were found in specimen Q3.

The two fragments of burned fabric composing specimen Q4 were found to be of different composition. The larger fragment is made of cotton and was woven with a plain weave. The smaller piece is not cotton but it was also woven with a plain weave. This piece was so badly charred that the type of fabric could not be determined.

There is attached hereto a copy of a communication received from [redacted] concerning this case. A copy of our reply to [redacted] is also enclosed.

b6
b7c

All of the evidence, Q1 through Q14, and the enclosures, except the photographs, are being returned to you under separate cover by railway express collect. The photographs have been retained in the Bureau's files. In the event you wish to have these photographs returned, please advise us and they will be forwarded to you immediately. The labels from the duplicate chair which were stated to be an enclosure were not received with the above-referenced communication.

RECORDED: 7-13-51
Meg

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Laboratory Work Sheet

WFO
x 11 2 5
7-25
1 ✓

Re: Mrs. MARY HARDY REESER, Deceased
Burned to Death in Apartment
1200 Cherry Street

File # 95-41192 - 1
Lab. # PC-30584 CC GX CW

copy to Miami F.O.

Examination requested by: J. R. Reichert, Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Fla.

Date of reference communication: Let. 7-7-51.

Date received: 7-10-51
REX

Examination requested: Chemical Analyses (General - Biochemical) Miscellaneous
Micro. Analyses (metallurgical)

Result of Examination:

Examination by: GORMEY
BIDEZ
LABOCK

Q1 softens @ 1000-1100°F
Q2 Identified as teeth by Dr. Stuart - Smithsonian
(one is plastic piece of denture)
Q1-14 No traces of accelerants, oxidizing agents etc.
Specimens submitted for examination

7/25/51
jey

- Q1 Glass fragments found in ashes
- Q2 Six small objects believed to be teeth
- Q3 Metal from near body
- Q4 Fibers believed to be part of nightgown
- Q5 Particles of bones found in ashes
- Q6 Charred fabric believed to be from chair
- Q7 Cotton material from chair
- Q8 Charred wood
- Q9 Charred legs from end table
- Q10 Charred fabric from rug
- Q11 Unburned section of rug, heavily soaked with greasy substance
- Q12 Remainder of ashes
- Q13 Shoe from foot not consumed by fire
- Q14 Chair springs

Q6, 7, etc extracted with petroleum ether, human fat only found present.

Laboratory Work Sheet

Re: Mrs. MARY HARDY SEESER, Deceased
Burned to Death in Apartment
1200 Cherry Street

File # 95-41192 - 1 ✓
PC-30584 CO CX CT
Lab. #

Examination requested by: J. R. Reichert, Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Fla.

Date of reference communication: Let. 7-7-51 Date received: 7-10-51
REX

Examination requested: Chemical Analyses (General - Biochemical) Miscellaneous
Micro. Analyses (metallurgical)

Result of Examination: Examination by: GORILEX
BINEZ
LANOCK ✓ 2.2.
7

Metal constituting Q3 does not appear to be from a lead storage battery. In Q3 is a portion of a cigarette lighter and the ^{other} metal in this specimen which had melted could have been also from a lighter, i.e., the lower portion ~~not from a lead acid container.~~ Melted metal could also be from a case of a hearing aid if specimens submitted for examination

- Q1 Glass fragments found in ashes it was made from a white metal
- Q2 Six small objects believed to be teeth similar to the white metal in Q3.
- Q3 Metal from near body No portions of a battery were in Q3..
- Q4 Fibers believed to be part of nightgown
- Q5 Particles of bones found in ashes
- Q6 Charred fabric believed to be from chair
- Q7 Cotton material from chair
- Q8 Charred wood
- Q9 Charred legs from end table
- Q10 Charred fabric from rug
- Q11 Unburned section of rug, heavily soaked with greasy substance
- Q12 Remainder of ashes
- Q13 Shoe from boot not consumed by fire
- Q14 Chair springs

7-25-51

Q3 contains a portion of what appears to be the top part of a cigarette lighter and a number of pieces of white metal which were melted and then solidified against some relatively flat surface. Metal is dirty appearing on outside.

2x10 spectrum analysis plate #1.

- 53 - SCALE
- 50 - C CONTROL
- 47 - FE ARC 5 SECS.
- 44 - Q3#1 35 SECS, MEDIUM ARC.
- 41 - Q3#2 " " " "
- 38 - FE ARC 5 SECS.
- 35 - Q3#3 35 SECS, MED. ARC
- 32 - Q3#4 " " " "
- 29 - FE ARC 5 SECS.

++ ++ ++ + +
Pb, Sn, Sb, Cu, As,
+ + + + +
Ni, Ag, Fe, Si, Mg, Si.

Storage battery lead is an antimonial lead containing 7-12% antimony and frequently 1/4% Sn. Hence NON-IDENTICAL ON STORAGE BATTERY LEAD. Could be from a cigarette lighter entirely. Not from a lead acid container.

Dict

The two fragments of burned fabric composing Specimen Q4 were found to be of different composition.

The larger fragment is made of cotton and was woven with a plain weave. The smaller piece is not cotton but it was also woven with a plain weave. This piece was so badly charred that the type of fiber could not be determined.

Laboratory Work Sheet

Re: Mrs. MARY HARDY REESER, Deceased
Burned to Death in Apartment
1200 Cherry Street

File # 95-41192 - 1 ✓
Lab. # PC-30584 CC GX CW

Examination requested by: J. R. Reichert, Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Fla.

Date of reference communication: Let. 7-7-51

Date received: 7-10-51

REX

Examination requested: Chemical Analyses (General - Biochemical) Miscellaneous
Micro. Analyses (metallurgical)

Result of Examination:

Examination by: GORMEY
BIDEZ
LAROCK

Specimens submitted for examination

- Q1 Glass fragments found in ashes
- Q2 Six small objects believed to be teeth
- Q3 Metal from near body
- Q4 Fibers believed to be part of nightgown
- Q5 Particles of bones found in ashes
- Q6 Charred fabric believed to be from chair
- Q7 Cotton material from chair
- Q8 Charred wood
- Q9 Charred legs from end table
- Q10 Charred fabric from rug
- Q11 Unburned section of rug, heavily soaked with greasy substance
- Q12 Remainder of ashes
- Q13 Shoe from boot not consumed by fire
- Q14 Chair springs

Q4 - 2 frags. both plain weave -
larger frag - cotton
smaller frag - not cotton but too badly charred for ident.

Laboratory Work Sheet

9

Re: Mrs. MARY HARRY WESSER, Deceased
Burned to Death in Apartment
1200 Cherry Street

File # 95-41192 -1 ✓
Lab. # 70-30384 CC BX CT

Examination requested by: J. H. Reichert, Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Fla.

Date of reference communication: L. O. 7-7-51 Date received: 7-10-51

Examination requested: Chemical Analyses (General - Biochemical) Miscellaneous
Micro. Analyses (metallurgical)

Result of Examination:

Examination by: G. H. H. L. L.

Q1-H & 3 enclosures attached
8/25/51

OK
File
Searcy

Specimens submitted for examination

- ✓ Q1 Glass fragments found in ashes
- ✓ Q2 Six small objects believed to be teeth
- ✓ Q3 Metal from near body
- ✓ Q4 Fibers believed to be part of nightgown
- ✓ Q5 Particles of bones found in ashes
- ✓ Q6 Charred fabric believed to be from chair
- ✓ Q7 Cotton material from chair
- ✓ Q8 Charred wood
- ✓ Q9 Charred legs from end table
- ✓ Q10 Charred sample from rug
- ✓ Q11 Unburned portion of rug, heavily soaked with greasy substance
- X Q12 Remains of ashes
- ✓ Q13 Shoe from bed not consumed by fire
- ✓ Q14 Chair springs

56 SEP 6 1951

Enclosures

J. R. REICHERT

Chief of Police

POLICE DEPARTMENT
Box 146
City of St. Petersburg, Florida.

CASS H. BURGESS

Lt. of Detectives

In Duplicate

109793

July 7, 1951

John Edgar Hoover, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C.

42-cc
4B } Gt
11 }
232 9.1

Attention: Laboratory

Dear Mr. Hoover:

PC 30584

At 8:07 a.m., Monday, July 2, 1951, we received report of a fire in apartment at 1200 Cherry Street, North East. MRS. MARY HARDY REESER was burned to death; cause of fire is not known. See diagram of apartment, attached.

The body of MRS. REESER was partially cremated with the exception of the left foot which was burned completely in two, about 4" above the ankle. Shoe as had been worn on left foot by the deceased was still intact. The chair in which she had been sitting was completely burned away, leaving just the springs. A small end table was completely burned with the exception of 2 legs. The carpet was burned in an area of approximately 3 ft.

The apartment showed signs of extreme heat on the ceilings, walls approximately 4 ft. from the floor. Plastic light switches had melted but floor plugs were unharmed. An electric clock stopped at 4:20 a.m.

MRS. REESER is described as wf, 67, 5:7, 170#.

ack'd 32
7-10-51
B/S

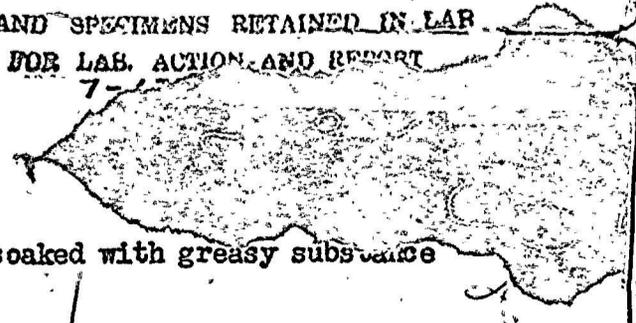
When last seen, at approximately 8 p.m. Sunday night, July 1, 1951, she was wearing a Van Raalte rayon acetate night-gown with a stocking weave. Her black rayon house coat could not be found.

Under separate cover, via RAILWAY EXPRESS, we are forwarding the following exhibits:

- Exhibit I Glass fragments found in ashes
- Exhibit II 6 small objects thought to be teeth
- Exhibit III Metal from near body
- Exhibit IV Fibers thought to be part of night-gown
- Exhibit V Particles of bones found in ashes
- Exhibit VI Charred fabric thought to be from chair
- Exhibit VII Cotton material from chair
- Exhibit VIII Charred wood
- Exhibit IX Charred legs from end table
- Exhibit X Charred fabric from rug
- Exhibit XI Unburned section of rug, heavily soaked with greasy substance
- Exhibit XII Rest of ashes
- Exhibit XIII Shoe from foot not consumed by fire
- Exhibit XIV Chair springs

~~EXPEDITE PROCESSING~~
JUL 9 1951

COPY AND SPECIMENS RETAINED IN LAB
FOR LAB. ACTION AND REPORT



41192-

SE-28
RECORDED - 1

195
JUL 9 1951
18 10

171
ENCL.
7-10-51
PRB INDEX

Page 2 - To: John Edgar Hoover, FBI
From: PD, St. Petersburg, Fla., July 7, 1951
Subj: MRS. MARY HARDY REESER -- Burned to Death in Mysterious Fire

109794

Examination requested:

1. Examine glass in Exhibit I to determine if any of the glass is part of bottle or container that might have contained a substance that would cause fire to burn with such intense heat. Determine heat necessary to soften glass to cause it to assume shape.
- ✓ 2. Examine small objects in Exhibit II to see if they are human teeth. If so, what heat would be necessary to destroy them to their present condition.
3. Examine metal in Exhibit III to see if it is lead, such as might be in a Hearing Aid or if from a lead acid container.
- ✓ 4. Examine fibers in Exhibit IV to see if they are from night-gown, etc. Night-gown is supposed to be rayon acetate combination.
- ✓ 5. Examine particles of bone in Exhibit V to ascertain the presence of any foreign substance that might have been used to start fire and maintain heat.
6. Examine articles in Exhibits VI, VII, VIII, IX, and X, also XII and XIV, for presence of any acid, or other substances that might have been used to start a fire or used to maintain intense heat.
7. Examine section of rug, Exhibit XI, and shoe, Exhibit XIII, to ascertain greasy substance which saturates same.
8. Any other test that might explain the almost complete destruction of a human body.

We also request any information or theories that could explain how a human body could be so destroyed and the fire confined to such a small area and so little damage done to the structure of the building and the furniture in the room not even scorched or damaged by smoke.

Photographs enclosed.

Labels from ^{duplicate} chair enclosed in which remains of MRS. REESER found.

This evidence has not been examined by any other Examiner, nor will it be.

Yours very truly,

J. R. Reichert
J. R. Reichert, Chief of Police

CHB/du

Encls.

171

95-41192-1

J. R. REICHERT

Chief of Police

POLICE DEPARTMENT
Box 146
City of St. Petersburg, Florida.

CASS H. BURGESS

Lt. of Detectives

In Duplicate

July 7, 1951

John Edgar Hoover, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C.

109795

Attention: Laboratory

Dear Mr. Hoover:

At 8:07 a.m., Monday, July 2, 1951, we received report of a fire in apartment at 1200 Cherry Street, North East. MRS. MARY HARDY REESER was burned to death; cause of fire is not known. See diagram of apartment, attached.

The body of MRS. REESER was partially cremated with the exception of the left foot which was burned completely in two, about 4" above the ankle. Shoe as had been worn on left foot by the deceased was still intact. The chair in which she had been sitting was completely burned away, leaving just the springs. A small end table was completely burned with the exception of 2 legs. The carpet was burned in an area of approximately 3 ft.

The apartment showed signs of extreme heat on the ceilings, walls approximately 4 ft. from the floor. Plastic light switches had melted but floor plugs were unharmed. An electric clock stopped at 4:20 a.m.

MRS. REESER is described as wf, 67, 5:7, 170#.

When last seen, at approximately 8 p.m. Sunday night, July 1, 1951, she was wearing a Van Raalte rayon acetate night-gown with a stocking weave. Her black rayon house coat could not be found.

Under separate cover, via RAILWAY EXPRESS, we are forwarding the following exhibits:

- Q Exhibit I Glass fragments found in ashes
- Q Exhibit II 6 small objects thought to be teeth
- Q Exhibit III Metal from near body
- Q Exhibit IV Fibers thought to be part of night-gown
- Q Exhibit V Particles of bones found in ashes
- Q Exhibit VI Charred fabric thought to be from chair
- Q Exhibit VII Cotton material from chair
- Q Exhibit VIII Charred wood
- Q Exhibit IX Charred legs from end table
- Q Exhibit X Unburned section of rug, heavily soaked with gas.
- Q Exhibit XI Rest of ashes
- Q Exhibit XII Shoe from foot not consumed by fire
- Q Exhibit XIII Chair springs

171

42-CC
3e-cw
435-est
11
PC-30584

Page 2 - To: John Edgar Hoover, FBI
From: FD, St. Petersburg, Fla., July 7, 1951
Subj: MRS. MARY HARDY REESER - Burned to Death in Mysterious Fire

109796

Examination requested;

1. Examine glass in Exhibit I to determine if any of the glass is part of bottle or container that might have contained a substance that would cause fire to burn with such intense heat. Determine heat necessary to soften glass to cause it to assume shape.
2. Examine small objects in Exhibit II to see if they are human teeth. If so, what heat would be necessary to destroy them to their present condition.
3. Examine metal in Exhibit III to see if it is lead, such as might be in a Hearing Aid or if from a lead acid container.
4. Examine fibers in Exhibit IV to see if they are from night-gown, etc. Night-gown is supposed to be rayon acetate combination.
5. Examine particles of bone in Exhibit V to ascertain the presence of any foreign substance that might have been used to start fire and maintain heat.
6. Examine articles in Exhibits VI, VII, VIII, IX, and X, also XII and XIV, for presence of any acid, or other substances that might have been used to start a fire or used to maintain intense heat.
7. Examine section of rug, Exhibit XI, and shoe, Exhibit XIII, to ascertain greasy substance which saturates same.
8. Any other test that might explain the almost complete destruction of a human body.

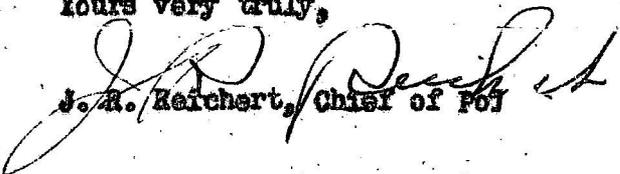
We also request any information or theories that could explain how a human body could be so destroyed and the fire confined to such a small area and so little damage done to the structure of the building and the furniture in the room not even scorched or damaged by smoke.

Photographs enclosed.

duplicate
Labels from chair enclosed in which remains of MRS. REESER found.

This evidence has not been examined by any other Examiner, nor will it be.

Yours very truly,


J. A. Hatcher, Chief of FBI

CHB/

Encls.

July 16, 1951

2

RECORDED - 128
INDEXED - 12

[Redacted]
Harris Calorific Sales Company
1620 Linwood
Oklahoma City 6, Oklahoma

b6
b7C

Dear [Redacted]

Thank you for your letter of July 7, 1951, in which you suggested consideration of the possibility that an oxy-acetylene torch may have been used in the cremation of a woman in St. Petersburg, Florida.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation does not have jurisdiction over this matter; however, I am taking the liberty of forwarding a copy of your letter to the authorities in St. Petersburg for their information.

I want you to know of my appreciation for the thought which prompted you to furnish this information.

Sincerely yours,

John Edgar Hoover
Director

JUL 17 2 34 PM '51
RECEIVED READING ROOM
FBI
U S DEPT OF JUSTICE

[Handwritten signatures and notes]

TDB:bjl

- Tolson _____
- Ladd _____
- Clegg _____
- Glavin _____
- Nichols _____
- Rosen _____
- Tracy _____
- Harbo _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Nease _____
- Gandy _____

JUL 17 1951

HARRIS CALORIFIC SALES CO.

SPECIALISTS IN THE WELDING AND CUTTING INDUSTRY



1620 Linwood
Oklahoma City 6, Oklahoma
Phone 7-0223

7-7-51

OXY-ACETYLENE
OXY-PROPANE
OXY-NATURAL
— GAS —
WELDING
CUTTING &
HEATING
APPARATUS

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D.C.

Gentlemen:

Have you considered the possibility
that an Oxy-acetylene torch
may have been used in the
cremation of the woman in
St Petersburg, Florida? The
Oxy-acetylene flame is one
of the hottest heats (Gas) known
to man. The soot discoloration
could easily have come from
such a flame. Hope this
thought may be of some help to
you.

EXPEDITE
JUL 23 1951

RECORDED - 128
95-41192-2
JUL 17 1951

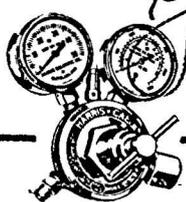
Yours very truly



b6
b7c

Mary Hardy Reese
ENCLOSURE ATTACHED
128

let 7/16/51
FDB



Office of Contents from
 BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
 WASHINGTON, D. C.

Re: Mrs. MARY HARDY REISER, Deceased
 Burned to Death in Apartment
 1203 Cherry Street

Date July 31, 1951 Case References _____

Consigned to: Mr. J. R. Reichert
Chief of Police
St. Petersburg, Florida

List of Contents

PC-30584 CC

Mr. Harbo, 7625 _____
 Mr. Conrad, 7142 _____
 Mr. Downing, 6228 IB _____
 Mr. Parsons, 7121 _____

95-41192 -- Q1 through Q14 and enclosures (except photographs)

RAILWAY EXPRESS COLLECT

95-41192-

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: Mail Room, place date of shipment and registry number; Shipping Room, show date of shipment and initial this invoice; then return it to person whose name is checked in column at right. After this checked name has been initialled, invoice should be placed in administrative file.

*Sent
8/2/51
JRW*

*Ret'd 8/2/51
JRW*

[Handwritten initials]

132



ENCLOSURE

95-41192-2

ENCLOSURE

Cremation of Woman in Chair Has Police in Florida Baffled

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla., July 5—
(AP)—Police are frankly and fully frustrated by the cremation of a 67-year-old clubwoman, both as to the cause of her death and the amazing body destruction that followed it.

Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser was almost completely cremated in the livingroom of her apartment early this week but the room was only slightly burned although morticians say flames of 1,500 to 2,000 degrees must be applied for hours to cremate a body.

Because of the obvious intensity of the heat, police virtually have abandoned suicide and accident theories. They won't say it was murder and have no disclosed theory as to the method used if it was a slaying. Nor, if death was natural, has anyone come forward with a possible explanation of the body's destruction.

When police entered the apartment Monday morning, all that remained of the 170-pound woman was her charred skull, shrunken to the size of a teacup, a section of backbone and part of a left foot, still encased in a suede shoe. The remains were removed in a small box.

No traces of gasoline or other fuel or chemical have been found.

A theory that Mrs. Reeser might have been asleep in a cotton-stuffed chair and accidentally set fire to the chair was eliminated because such a blaze could not have produced

the intense heat which consumed the body.

While such a fierce flame was destroying the body only a small area of the rug was burned and many nearby objects weren't scorched. Some electric light switches were melted yet lower wall outlets were in working order. The doorknob was so hot that when the apartment owner discovered the tragedy Monday morning she had to summon workmen to open the door. There was a faint soot discoloration on upper walls, lower portions were unmarked.

One chemical combination under investigation as the possible agent of destruction is a formula of ether and alcohol. A panel of physicians has tested the compound and found it chars animal tissue quickly.

A sample of the body ashes and other residue from the small flame area have been sent to the FBI Washington laboratory.

Mrs. Reeser's remains will be buried Friday in Chestnut Hill cemetery, Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Lamb-Freeman Ceremony Held

SOLEMNIZED Saturday at 8 p. m. in the Baptist temple was the wedding of Miss Ramona Adeline Freeman and Richard Charles Lamb. The bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Freeman, 3204 NW 29, and the bridegroom's parents are Mr. and Mrs. Frank Webb, Celina, Ohio. Rev. Finley W. Tinnin jr., pastor, read the vows for the couple.

Mrs. Bruce Govett, Sulphur, a cousin of the bride, organist, played a program of nuptial music and accompanied Marwood McClelland vocalist.

THE bride, who was given in marriage by her father, wore a dress of white satin. Illusion was caught at intervals by small white satin rosebuds and outlined the low neckline. White silk net formed the yoke and the full skirt extended into a cathedral train. Her fingertip-length veil of illusion was attached to a satin tiara covered with seed pearls. She carried a white Bible topped with pink rosebuds and white carnations.

Miss Jane Webb, Celina, a sister of the bridegroom, was maid of honor. Bridesmaids were Miss Betty Coulter

Event Is Held At Lake Texoma

ENTERTAINING at a house party at Lake Texoma recently was Mr. and Mrs. Paul X. Johnston, NW 15, and their son, Paul Ross Johnston. Their guests were Miss Mignon Russell, Miss Janice Jones and Mr. Warmer, all of Kansas City, Mo.

Paul Ross Johnston and Mr. Warmer are classmates at Pembroke Country Day, Kansas City. The visitors returned to their homes during weekend.

Square Dance Slated

Sooner Star Square Dance club will hold its regular meeting at 8:30 p. Saturday in Knights of Columbus hall. Host couple will be Mr. and Mrs. Abe Shirley, 3944 NW 13.

NOW! 3 P AND ODO

NEW! LOTION-GENTLE
to stop odor, ch



August 30, 1951

- 3

RECORDED - 59

EX - 15

Detective Lieutenant Cass H. Burgess
Police Department
Post Office Box 146
St. Petersburg, Florida

My dear Lieutenant:

I have received your very thoughtful letter of August 24, 1951, in the case involving the death of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser.

You may be sure that it was a pleasure for our representatives in the field and in our FBI Laboratory to be of service to you. Please be assured that whenever we can be of further aid, we will be glad to have you call upon us.

Sincerely yours,
J. Edgar Hoover

cc - Philadelphia

cc - Miami

NOTE: The case mentioned by Mr. Burgess is set forth in Bufile 95-41192.

RECEIVED
AUG 30 2 51 PM '51
DIRECTOR

ROK:par:rm

RECEIVED
FBI

[Handwritten signature]

COMM - FBI
AUG 31 1951
MAILED 20

- Tolson _____
- Ladd _____
- Clegg _____
- Glavin _____
- Nichols _____
- Rosen _____
- Tracy _____
- Harbo _____
- Algen _____
- Belmont _____
- Laughlin _____
- Mohr _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Nease _____
- Gandy _____



City of St. Petersburg, Florida

"THE SUNSHINE CITY"
COUNCIL-MANAGER GOVERNMENT

DIVISION OF POLICE
P. O. BOX 146



J. R. REICHERT
CHIEF OF POLICE

C. H. BURGESS
LIEUTENANT OF DETECTIVES

August 24th, 1951

ry

Howmley

J. Edgar Hoover, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Hoover:

I am taking this opportunity, on the part of our entire Department, to thank you, your Laboratory and special agents in Philadelphia and those in St. Petersburg, for the valuable assistance rendered in our cremation case involving the death of MRS. MARY HARDY REESER.

This Department is very grateful for this service and if we can ever be of any assistance, at any time, do not hesitate to call upon us.

Yours very truly,

Cass H. Burgess
Cass H. Burgess, Lt. of Detectives

ca

CHB/du

Cc: Special Agent in Charge
Philadelphia, Penna.

Special Agent in Charge
Miami, Florida

RECORDED - 53

INDEXED - 53

SEP 8 1951

EX - 15

95-41192-3

Handwritten signatures and initials

PHAS. FILES

95-41192

Handwritten notes:
mail
ack 5-30
ROK

May 15, 1952

RECORDED - 7

INDEXED - 7

Mr. Joseph Corona
Editor
True Police Cases
67 West 44th Street
New York 18, New York

G.I.R. 6

Dear Mr. Corona:

EX-25

Thank you for your letter of May 8, 1952, with enclosure.

It was indeed thoughtful of you to send me the letter of [redacted] concerning the cremation death of Mrs. Mary H. Reeser, and I sincerely appreciate the courtesy and interest which prompted you to do so.

b6
b7c

Sincerely yours,
J. Edgar Hoover

NOTE: The Laboratory has advised that enclosed letter is a purely irrational analysis of the death of Mrs. Reeser.

TEB:ns:cdm

- Tolson _____
- Ladd _____
- Nichols _____
- Belmont _____
- Clegg _____
- Glavin _____
- Harbo _____
- Rosen _____
- Tracy _____
- Mohr _____
- Tele. Rm. _____
- Nease _____
- Gandy _____

COMM - FBI
MAY 16 1952
MAILED 20

RECEIVED RESEARCH
FBI
MAY 15 7 26 PM '52

MAY 16 10 03 AM '52
S. DEPT. OF JUSTICE
DIRECTOR

JUN 26 1952

TRUE POLICE CASES

A FAWCETT PUBLICATION

67 WEST 44TH STREET
NEW YORK 18, N. Y.

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Ladd	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Clegg	_____
Mr. Glavin	_____
Mr. Harbo	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tracy	_____
Mr. Laughlin	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

b6
b7c

May 8, 1952

MARY HARDY REESER

Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.

95-41192

W 9-1

Dear Mr. Hoover:

Although I realize that your Bureau has rendered an opinion on the cremation death of Mrs. Mary H. Reeser of St. Petersburg, Florida, I thought you might be interested in reading the enclosed letter from [redacted] on the subject.

The first two pages of the letter contained references to the current issue of TRUE POLICE CASES, and had no bearing on the Reeser case.

I hope that my forwarding [redacted] letter will in no way be an imposition on you and your Bureau.

ENCL 9

Sincerely,

Joseph Corona
Joseph Corona
Editor

jc/bw

*irrational analysis
by detective story reader*
ack. 5/18/52
TEB

letter to Corona
oml

RECORDED - 7

EX-25

95-41192-4

JUN 3 1952

478B

~~EXPRESS PROCESSING~~

Before leaving California, I received a long letter from [] author of the story about cremation of Mrs. Reeser in Florida. He went into detail concerning the matter. I was much pleased that you and [] felt that any suggestion of mine merited consideration because I do wish I could be helpful about finding the person who burned her. As you probably have as much information, (not in mags), as [] sent me, I will tell you about that but I will outline for you my reply to him, which went out yesterday.

Nothing in the magazine story nor in the letter of [] changed my mind in the least. I firmly believe she was murdered. I believe I know why and by whom but, as in many cases in court, not enough evidence is presented at this time and I fear much was destroyed by people who kept saying, "Well, I never heard of anything like it", and, goggle-eyed, let evidence get away from them.

It is my contention that the murderer executed a well and long planned crime but the very fact that he, or she, felt so secure, was the very fact that makes me believe a slip was made which could have been discovered in the beginning.

Because I believe you are as sincerely interested as I am, I will discuss it a bit with you. After all, you do not have to read this lengthy epistle all at once. You can take it, leave it or take it in small doses.

From the beginning, there were some small discrepancies which could not be explained easily. Of course, I am working considerably in the dark because of lack of very small details. My contention is that, in a murder case, there is nothing too small and insignificant to be noticed. I doubt if such a mind applied itself right at the beginning so much was probably lost.

Now, if the FBI stated that she burned to death by a cigarette igniting her rayon robe, then I will have lost confidence in the FBI and its infallibility. If you will recall having read of people burning to death in their homes - the fire would burn fiercely for a long time but when finally put out, a good portion of the torso of each victim would be practically intact. Also, such burnings had APPLIED heat to consume whatever portions of such bodies as were left. In other words, when the applied heat was stopped, the bodies did not continue to burn. I believe it is not possible for Mrs. Reeser to have been fat enough to burn and leave no more of herself than was left. Try firing a piece of suet, all fat, plus some lean. The suet will burn but not with enough generation of heat to consume the lean.

A woman who worked at crematorium states that bodies are continually sprayed with oil to keep them burning with heat enough to consume. Everything points to fact that APPLIED heat was put on Mrs. Reeser IF -

Now right there I always stuck. I am informed that a foot was unconsumed. I have not seen that so do not know what it looked like but I know what appearance it should have had. I am told there was a piece of liver, some spinal column bones and a thigh bone and a shrunken skull found.

Was any test made of foot to discover condition - whether from Mrs. Reeser - whether embalmed foot - whether from drugged body - etc., etc.? I venture no such examinations were ever made and they might have told much.

Liver - was any test made to discover whether or not it was from a human? If so, it should have disclosed something concerning the person it was taken from.

95-34119 - 4
ENCLOSURE

The thigh bone and the spinal column should each have disclosed some information. They were excellent material for disclosing height and probable weight of person from whom they were taken. Also condition of health, etc. Might even have told how long person from whom they came had been deceased.

And now we come to something I consider very odd. I have read of the shrunken skulls made by natives of another country. I read that they carefully remove skin, (which is thick) from the head bones and fill said head skin with hot sand in order to shrink same. I do not understand how a human head could be shrunken with the bones inside of it. Also, a head would be a mine of information. The features could be brought to normal, almost, and the teeth should disclose something. It was not stated whether Mrs. Reeser had false teeth or not or whether, if so, she had them in her mouth or they were found in the apartment in bathroom or elsewhere. IF false teeth were in that skull, they would tell a story; if there were no false teeth, they would also tell a story. Even if skull and features were distorted, they would still give out information. What was done about them?

And so we come to what has been my main thought? Why was there not enough odor about that apartment to attract attention of firemen when they went in to put out fire? My information states that they did not know anyone had burned until a fireman's foot slipped in something on the floor. Now, if you had ever been a housewife, you would KNOW that just a very small roast or stew of meat when burned scents the house until just a few hours will not entirely dispense with the odor of burned flesh. It is very penetrating and remains clinging to furnishings. Firemen should certainly have noticed such especially since they are supposed to be experts in the fire line and also because the fire was not great enough or fierce enough to distract their attention beyond normal. To not notice such an odor and only to discover a thing because one slipped in something on the floor and saw a human foot was such a strange thing, it kept me wondering and then the obvious hit me.

The probable reason no one noticed odor of burning flesh was because Mrs. Reeser was NOT BURNED! Only a small piece of liver and the top part of foot was scorched to give credence to what someone wanted people to believe.

I am forced to believe, from meager facts at hand, that Mrs. Reeser did take two regular sleeping pills which made her groggy. While in that condition, someone in whom she had confidence, came and asked her to go somewhere, or something like that, and she left. I believe this must have been under her own power because she was crippled and very heavy and would have been too much to handle if already dead, therefore she was alive but groggy from effects of sleeping tablets when she left under her own power. I believe that one who took her away, either supplied a foot resembling hers, or, after her death, cut off one of her feet, maybe because of certain deformity which could not be faked, her own foot had to be used to help establish identity. I believe part of spinal column and thigh bone and skull were put with foot and a piece of liver and THEN the fire was set to chair. Then and in that event, the fire would probably not take more than thirty minutes, if an attachment could be made to gas which was available, or even less if acetylene torch was used. It had to be an APPLIED and CONTROLLED fire in order to accomplish certain definite things but, after those things were accomplished, it could have been that other things planned were not accomplished. However, the above will explain why there was no more odor and why there was no more fire. There had to be certain things for identification of apparent victim and certainly it was not intended that the property burn down and make identification impossible. I have two theories but not enough information to work either of them out and fit the pieces exactly.

alone and JUST WHEN; someone who could gain access to her without suspicion of anyone; someone in whom she had utmost confidence; someone who either gave her something other than sleeping pills so she would be dead when burned or someone who had access to props, (skull, etc.) and who used such to fool people into believing she burned herself todæath. It had to be someone who would profit by her death in some manner - either financially or emotionally. Elderly people can be very possessive and usurp time and attention, etc. and no way for people to do much about it.

I am informed she always took dinner at her son's a certain day. Now that might prove to be very annoying. To have even the dearest and nearest ALWAYS tying down that certain time each week, etc. No matter if she was asked, that might be form and not sincere desire for her company. Also, same as in divorce, families have, on each side, a story they tell to the world and act out BUT, in the final analysis, as in divorce, somewhere between those stories lies the REAL story and it is not the same as either side's published story although it may have facts from each in the REAL story but such real stories seldom reach the outside world but are bottled up in the emotional self of each individual until the cork pops out and one thing or another results. How tightly such things are bottled depends on the upbæinging of individuals - the tighter the bottling of emotions, the more violent the explosion when it comes.

I believe that Mrs. Reeser might have written letters or a letter to someone in whom she confided - usually each person has at least one trusted confidant OUTSIDE of immediate family because, too often, emotional upsets are family affairs. Such person as recipient would not want to talk because of publicity and natural distaste for violating confidence. But it is not only possible such written evidence of what might be about to happen does exist but very probable, in my opinion.

The fact that, in the past, she had visited in old home town would not necessarily mean she intended to do so this time UNTIL CONDITIONS became such that she felt she MUST get away. Maybe she was afraid. There is no one to tell you and maybe no one is capable of gaining confidence of those who may KNOW some little thing - like her beginning to tell something and then her eyes filling with tears or some other small incident which could be very revealing. I have always studied people - I like them and I like the study. I was a doctor (D.C., Ph.C.), for more than twenty years and I early discovered that ill people do not always become so because of cancer or other troubles of like nature. No, Mr. Corona, the great majority of people are functionally upset, and they are so because of emotional upsets which cause them to eat incorrectly, sleep too little and so, on and on. In order to learn concerning such people so I could truly help them be normal, I began reading fact detective stories and have kept it up through the years. They have helped me to understand and help people all along the way and still function in that capacity.

Finally, most officers are not trained to cope with such a case as that of Mrs. Reeser and such leaves them flabbergasted because they never were chosen as officers because of their peculiar mental abilitties to ferret out crime and the criminals. Rather, they were chosen politically and for brawn. Some of them because enough interested AFTER they became officers to develop their brains along detective lines and so we do have very able detectives but they are in the minority. I could tell you of a case here which passes belief of a murdered boy. Officers insist he was a suicide by hanging but, when found, his body had legs and arms drawn up and stiff in that position and there is much, much more.

Mr. Corona, I would like to find a magazine devoted to UNSOLVED murder and other criminal cases, disappearances, etc. People like to discuss mysteries. If not a whole magazine, then at least one story in each issue of some magazine. When such a one does disappear and a magazine or newspaper plays it up, people discuss it for a long time afterwards and weeks and months afterwards, you can refer to it and people will say, "oh, yes, I remember that", and go on to recall facts. Much good might come of such.

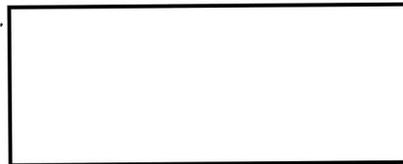
I saw a picture in INSIDE DETECTIVE of the Reeser scene of cremation. The chair springs were there and other odds and ends. I was much impressed by the fact that Mrs. Reeser disappeared so completely and that picture seemed to show that things more readily combustible than a human body REMAINED UNBURNED. I do like two plus two to equal four, always. I can believe that the murderer set the scene so people would believe what was intended for people to believe. Therefore, after studying all the points of information I have, I can very readily believe she was not cremated but was disposed of outside of and away from that apartment and the stage set with props to make believe she sat in that chair and burned to death therein. If she would have been taken away and the fire set afterwards with props of piece of liver, some bones and A SKULL, that would come nearer making four than the statement that she burned in that chair which hardly makes sense.

Hope I have not bored you and I sincerely hope that something I may have written regarding this case will help someone to solve the puzzle. Such should have every effort made to solve it because of the after effects on criminal minds.

I will try to keep up with your magazine in the future and will look forward with pleasure to more good stories.

With best wishes, I am,

Sincerely,



b6
b7C

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
FBI LABORATORY

Sept 1952

Director	5633	Mr. Harbo	7625
Mr. Tolson	5744	Mr. Bowles	7601
Mr. Ladd	5736	Mr. Conrad	7140
Mr. Nichols	5640	Mr. Downing	7621
Mr. Belmont	1742	Mr. Parsons	7121
Mr. Clegg	5256	Lab. Routing	7621
Mr. Glavin	5517	Secretary	7625
Mr. Rosen	5706	Reading Rm.	5531
Mr. Tracy	IB 4130		
Mr. Mohr	5744	M	
Mr. Nease	5633		
Miss Gandy	5635	See Me	

Ack without comment

R. T. Harbo

August 6, 1952

Mr. Jacob B. Teichert
Chief of Police
St. Petersburg, Florida

Re: Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser-Deceased
Burned to Death in Apartment
1200 Cherry Street

My dear Chief:

On July 7, 1951, you forwarded to the FBI Laboratory numerous items of evidence for examination in this case. The results of our examination were reported to you on July 31, 1951, in Laboratory report FG-30524.

As you will recall we retained in our files the photographs of the fire scene which you forwarded to us. We are preparing case material on Laboratory side in investigation of arson and related cases and, because of the unusual reports of the Reeser case, would like to use several of these photographs and an account of the case for illustrative purposes.

It will be very helpful to us if you would submit a brief summary of the facts of this case and your final disposition of it. Would you also submit a copy of the apartment diagram if it is available now? Of course, no names or references will be used in our preparation of this material by which the principals may be identified. If for any reason objections exist to the use of this material, please feel free to indicate them.

Sincerely yours,

RECORDED - 116

5

AUG 8 1952
John Edgar Hoover
Director

EX-28

2 - Miami

- Tolson _____
- Ladd _____
- Nichols _____
- Belmont _____
- Clegg _____
- Glavin _____
- Harbo _____
- Rosen _____
- Tracy _____
- Mohr _____
- Tele. Rm. _____
- Nease _____
- Gandy _____

JLG:VH

68 AUG 13 1952

COMM - FBI
MAILED 28

RECEIVED
AUG 6 6 33 PM '52

August 22, 1952

Mr. J. R. Reichert
Chief of Police
Post Office Box 146
Saint Petersburg, Florida

My dear Chief:

I have received your letter of August 14, 1952, forwarding the material which we requested in connection with the death of Mrs. Mary Hardy Roeser.

Your cooperation in furnishing this material to us is greatly appreciated. May I assure you of my desire to be of assistance to you whenever possible in matters of mutual interest.

Sincerely yours,

John Edgar Hoover
Director

95-41192

JIG:bjl

[Handwritten initials]

[Handwritten initials]

- Tolson _____
- Ladd _____
- Clegg _____
- Glavin _____
- Nichols _____
- Rosen _____
- Tracy _____
- Harbo _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Nease _____
- Gandy _____

MAILED 10
AUG 29 1952

RECEIVED
AUG 29 1952

[Handwritten mark]

32 AUG 25 1952.



City of St. Petersburg, Florida

"THE SUNSHINE CITY"
COUNCIL-MANAGER GOVERNMENT

DIVISION OF POLICE
P. O. BOX 146

August 14th, 1952



J. R. REICHERT
CHIEF OF POLICE

C. H. BURGESS
LIEUTENANT OF DETECTIVES

Handwritten initials: J.R.

J. Edgar Hoover, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Hoover:

Handwritten: 9-1
Handwritten: CM

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of August 6, relative to the case of MRS. MARY HARDY REESER, deceased, who was burned to death in apartment at 1200 Cherry St., N. E., this City.

Attached you will find copy of Special Report of the findings of our Detectives and which is self-explanatory.

G.I.R.-6

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b7C

2 copies of the apartment diagram are also attached.

Also attached is a summary of this case as released by me on August 8, 1951, that appeared in our local newspapers, stating this was an "accident, until such time as we can prove otherwise".

Handwritten: cy

We have no objections, whatever, to your using any and all evidence in your Bureau.

ENCLO. ATTACHED

Yours very truly,

Handwritten signature: J. R. Reichert
J. R. Reichert, Chief of Police

Handwritten: 5 ENCL
Handwritten: 131
Handwritten: /dlb
Handwritten: Encls.

Handwritten: Letter
Handwritten: 8-22-52
Handwritten: J.L. of Ppt

RECORDED - 131

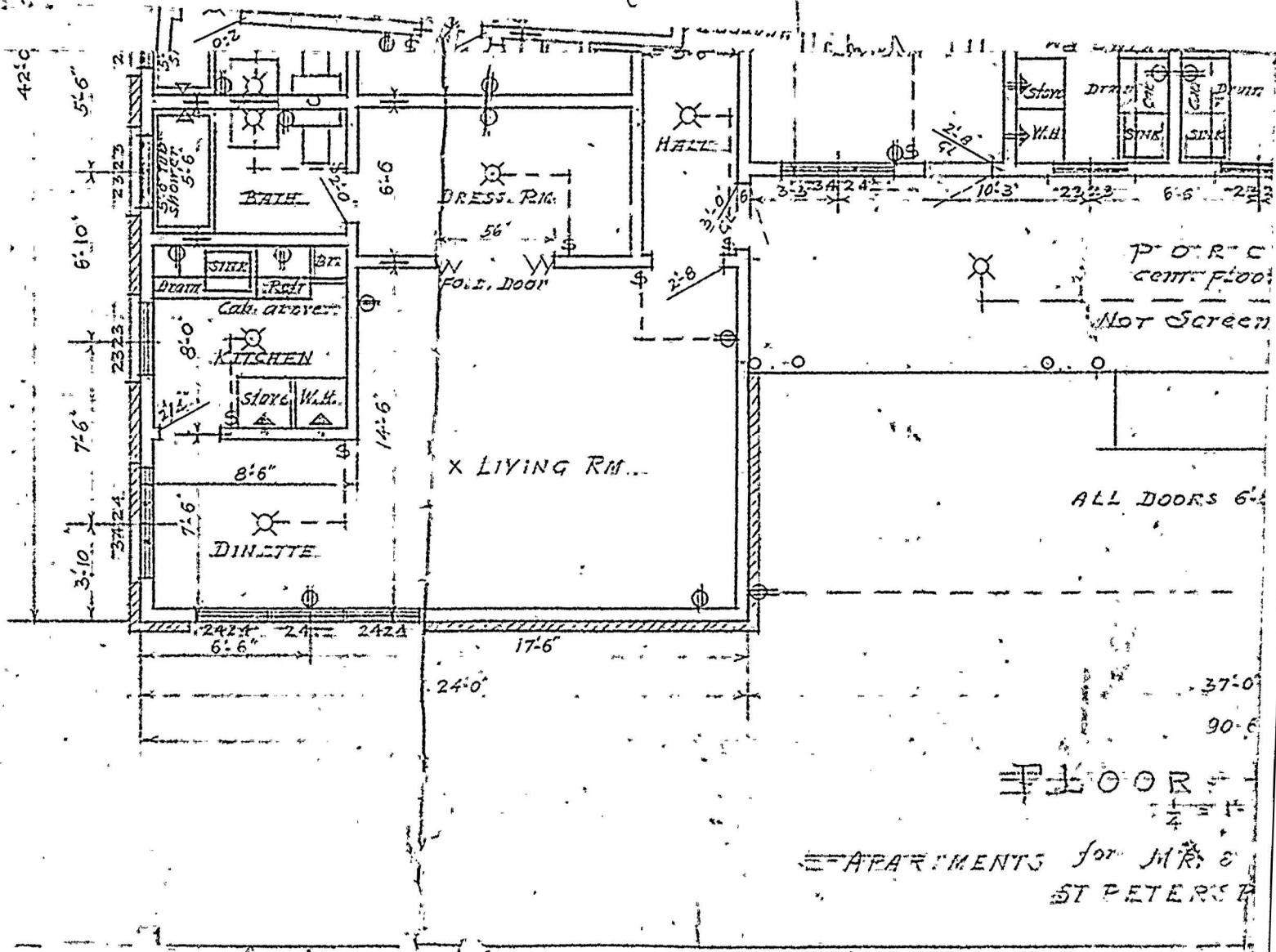
EX-100

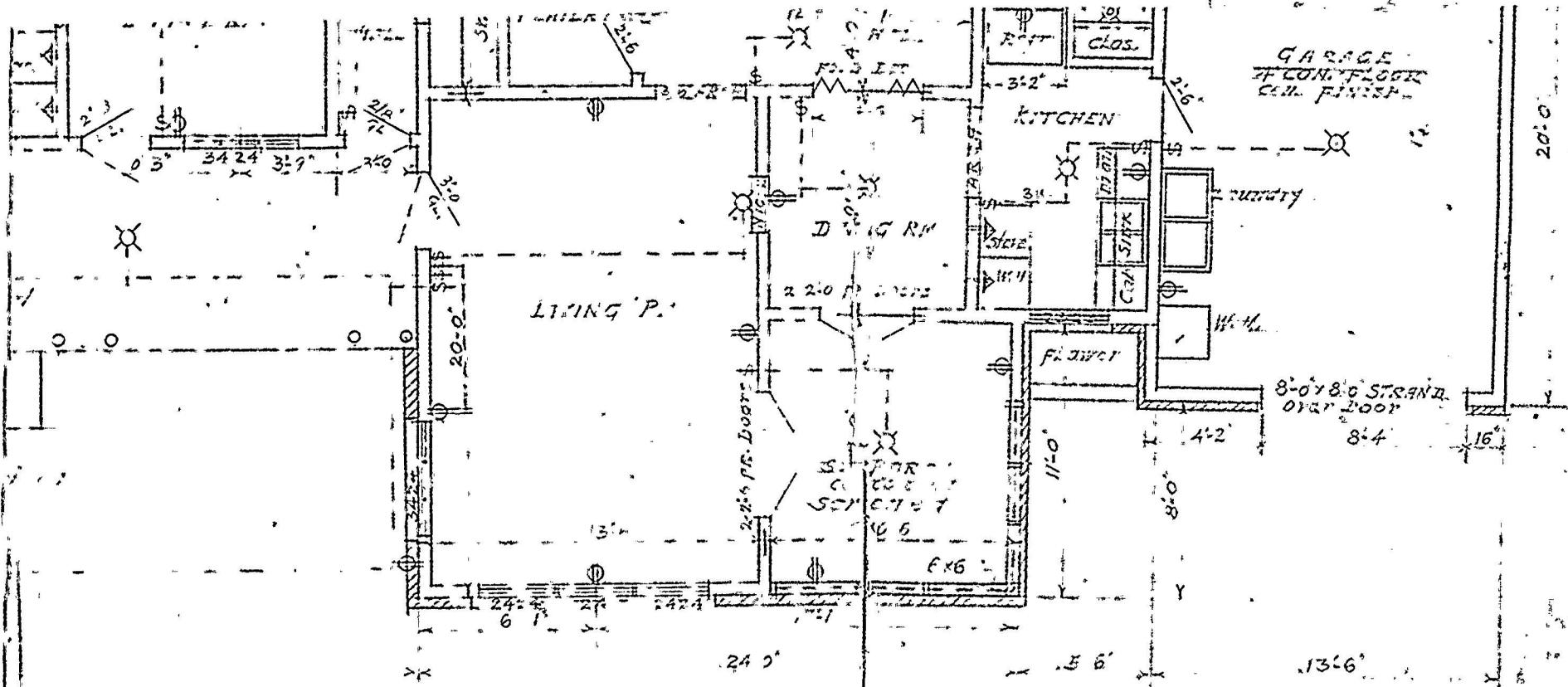
Handwritten: 195-411-9276

AUG 19 1952

2

Handwritten signature
SEVEN

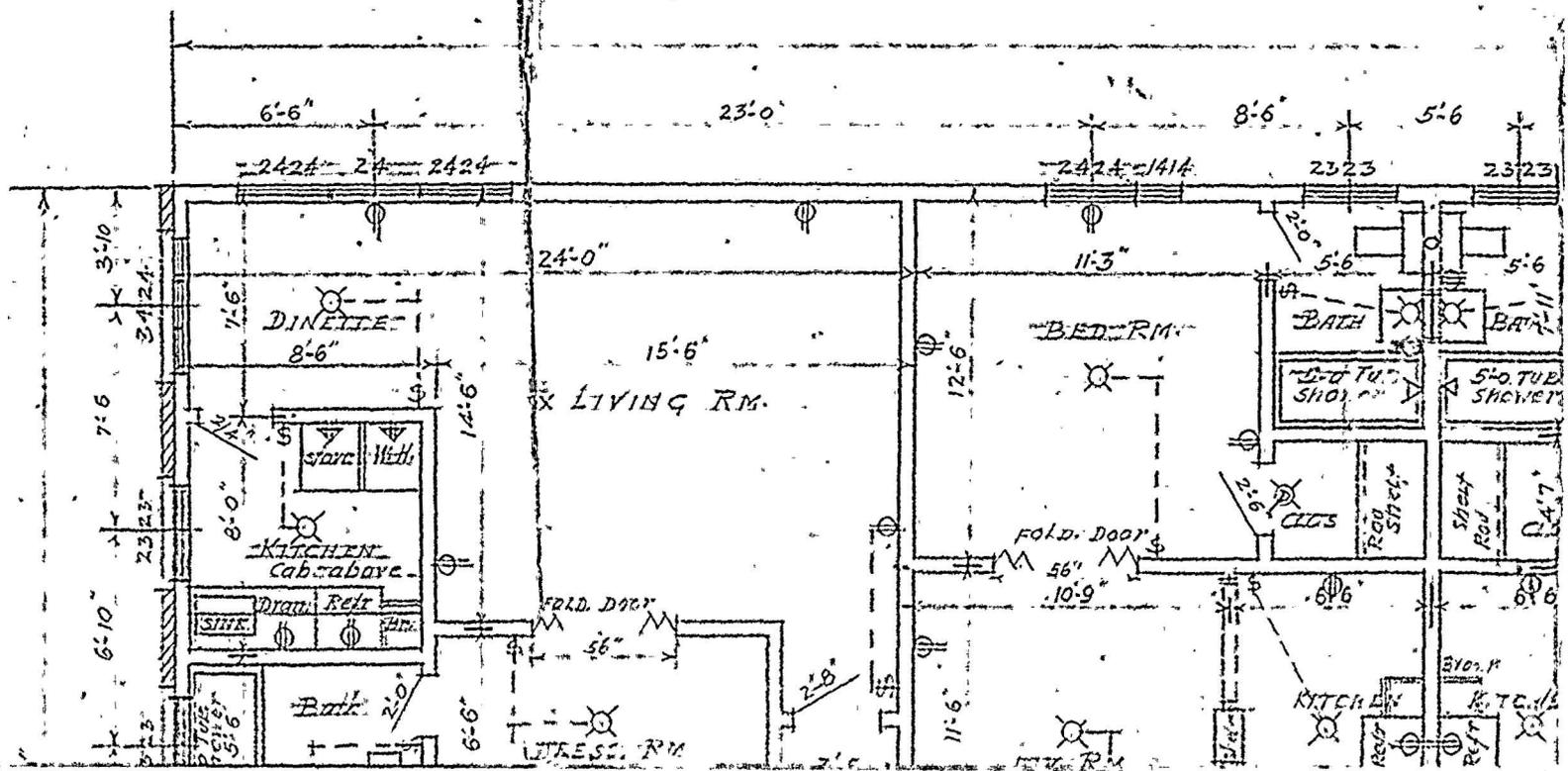


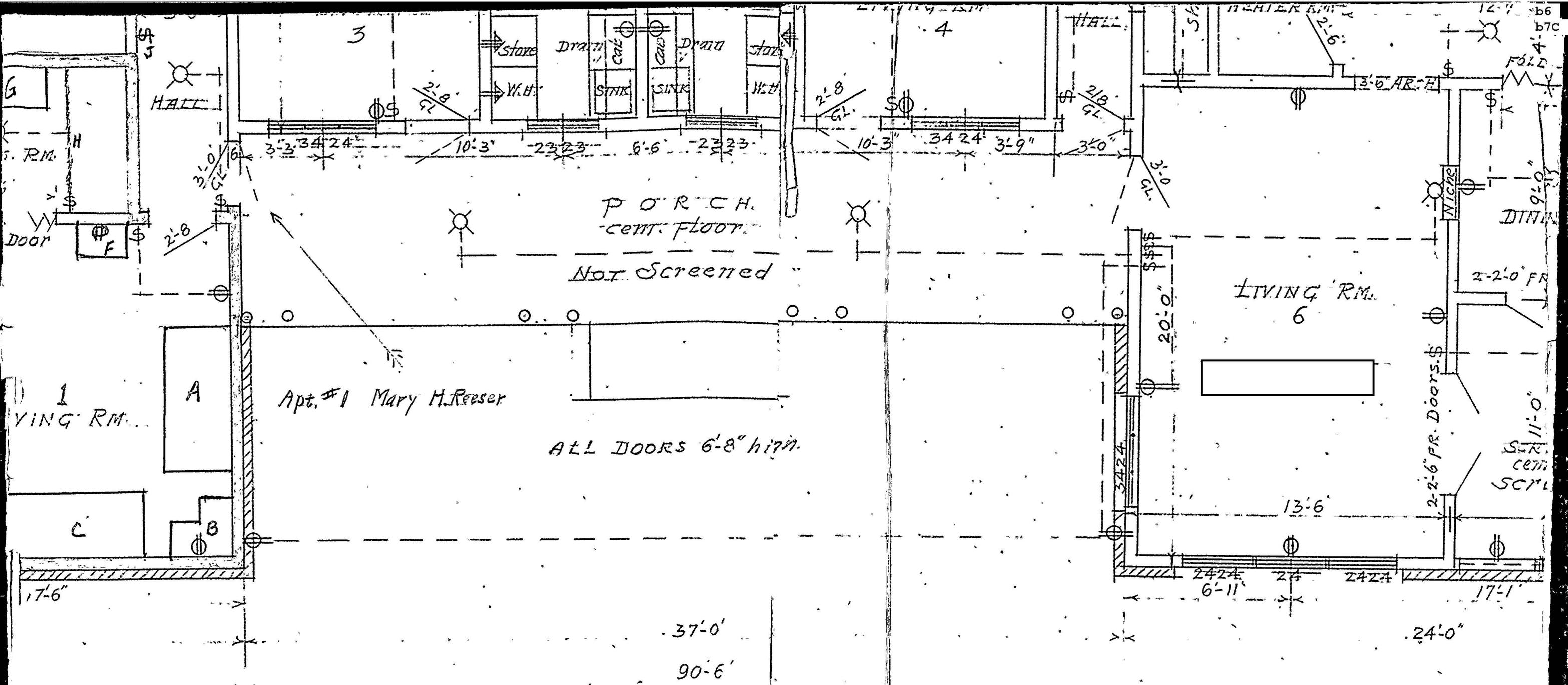


C. W. J. WOOD BR
 S. H. A.

ARCHITECT
 PLAN - 1160
 SHEET - 2

b6
 b7C





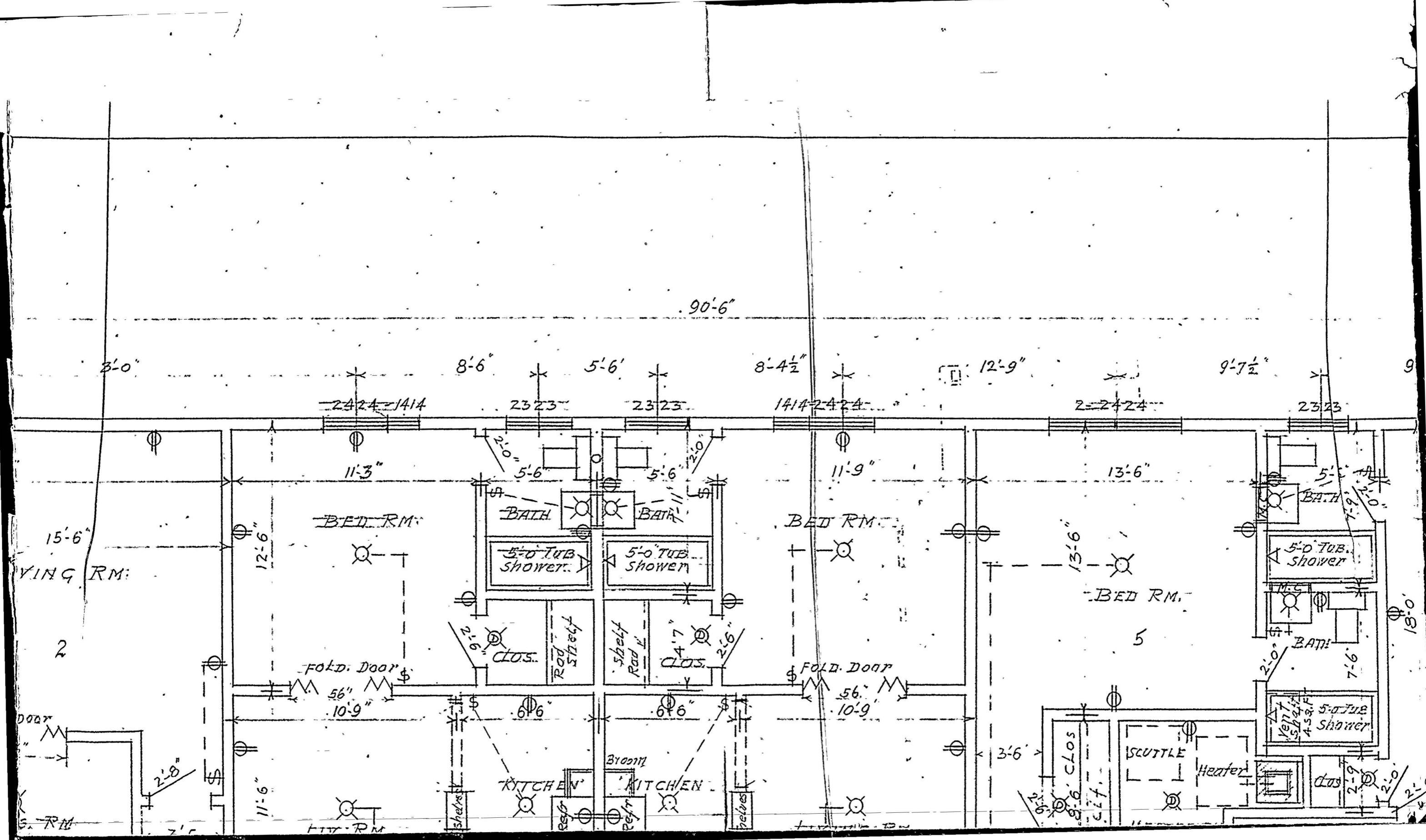
FLOOR PLAN
 $\frac{1}{4} = 1'-0$

APARTMENTS for [redacted]
 ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.

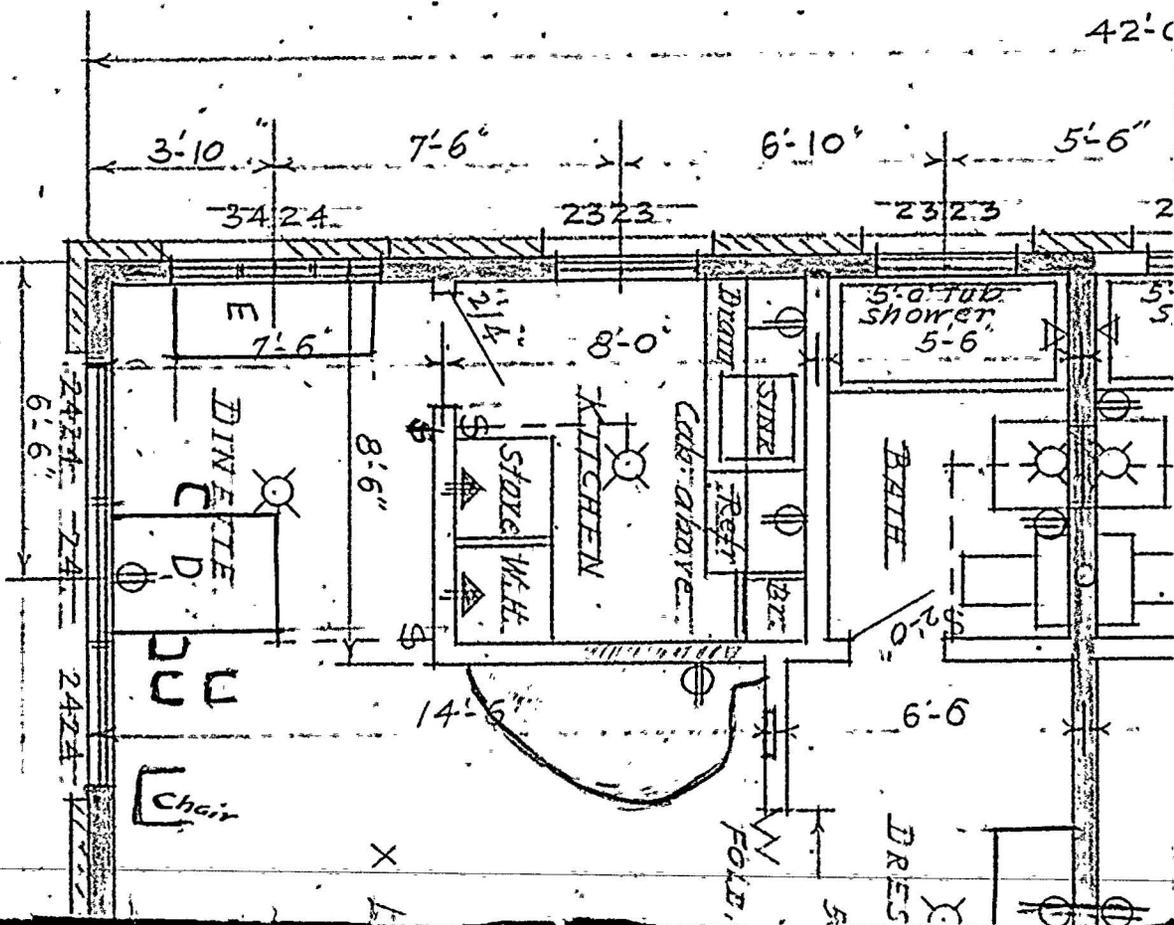
ry Street NE



b6
b7c

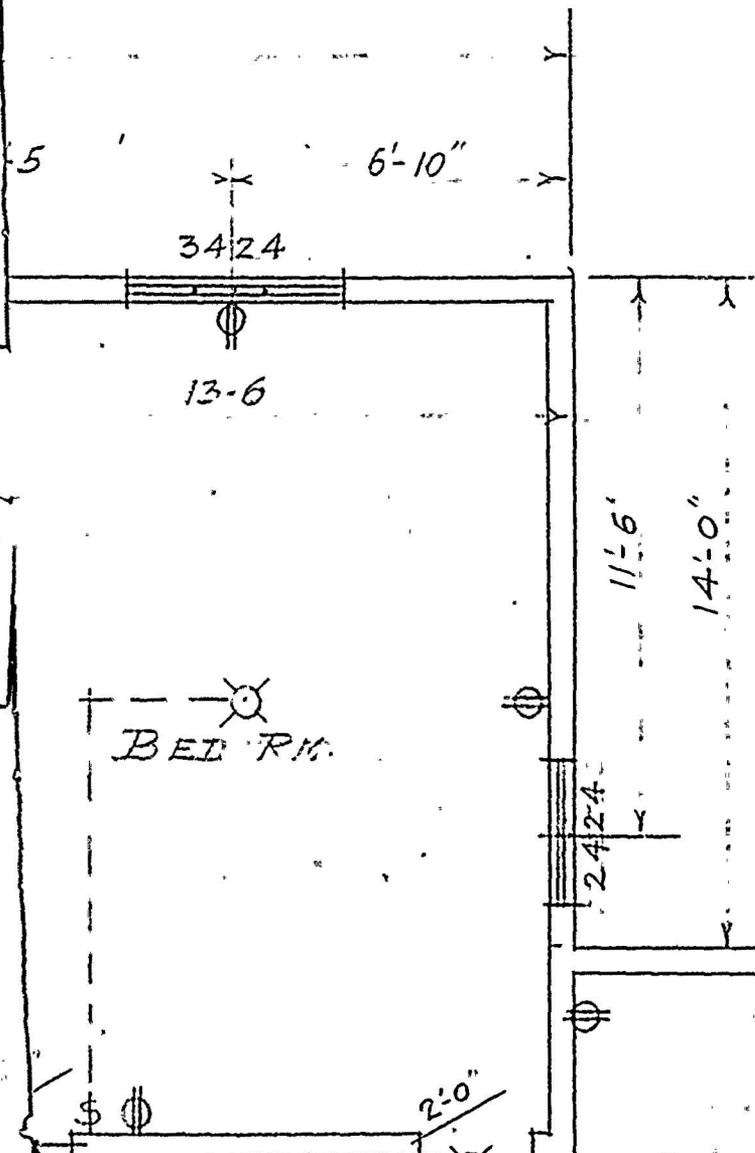


1275 AVO. N.Y.



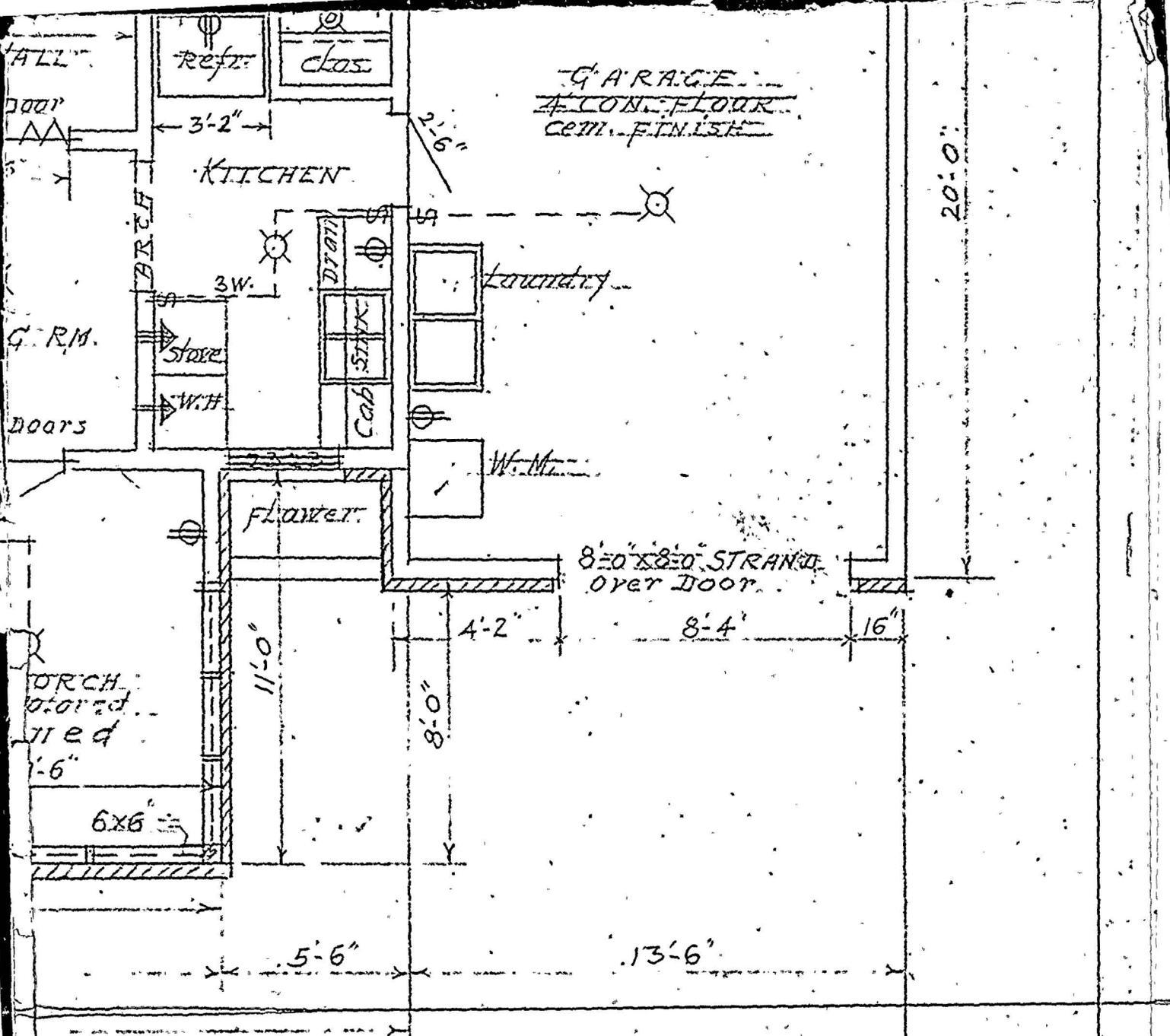
Chae

24:0



Each Apartment to have
Separate Electr. Meter

Wood Sash



GARAGE
 4 CON. FLOOR
 CEM. FINISH

20'-0"

8'-0" x 8'-0" STRAND
 OVER DOOR

5'-6" 13'-6"

LEGEND

- A - DAY BED (Not made up)
- B - CORNER TABLE
- C - DAY BED (Made up)
- D - DINETTE TABLE
- E - BUFFET
- F - TABLE
- G - DRESSER
- H - PLASTIC DRAW CURTAIN
- J - SWITCH

ARCHITECT
 PLANS 1160
 SHEETS 2

b6
 b7c

COPY

SPECIAL REPORT OF [] & []

Compl. #13914
MRS. MARY HARDY REESER
1200 CHERRY ST. NE
BURNED TO DEATH

JULY 2, 3, 4, 1951

PREDICATION: Complaint from #1 Fire Station relative to an explosion and/or fire at above address; originally answered by LT. [] PATROLMEN [] & [] complaint filled in by LT. [] as follows:

MRS. MARY HARDY REESER, 67, was burned to death at above address; apartment on ground floor. THE RHODES FUNERAL HOME has body. [] was the Coroner. They have not decided what could be the cause of this fire at this time. The electric clock was stopped at 4:20. MRS. REESER'S chair in the S.W. corner of the living room was all burned up but the springs. The body was East of the chair on the floor - head South, feet North. Body was all burned but the knees to the feet were all right. Black suede shoes were not burned.

INVESTIGATION:

Investigation of the premises showed that the apartment was the S.E. apartment of the ALLAMANDA APTS., owned by and operated by MRS. PANSY M. CARPENTER.

On entering screen door to a hallway a left turn is made to get to the door of the apt. in question. This door was partly open on our arrival and we were informed by [] that that was the way the door was when she first discovered the fire.

The hall between the apt. of MRS. REESER and the other apt. in the wing was well smoked up from a distance of about 3 ft. from the floor to the ceiling. The ceiling was heavily smoked and the face plate to the switch in the hall was melted out of shape. This face plate was approximately 8 ft. from the door to the REESER apartment.

The entire apartment ceiling was blackened by smoke; drapes in the dining area were blackened around the top but were not scorched.

South window screen in dining area was clogged with soot.

Folding doors between the dining area and the kitchen were blackened but not scorched.

Face plates on light switches in the apartment were melted; however face plates on wall outlets located at about 2½ ft. from the floor were not damaged at all.

Folding doors from living area to dressing room were scorched around top.

The heater in the living room appeared in good shape and was turned off.

The bathroom was heavily smoked, altho there was no damage to light fixtures.

Two plastic bathing caps hanging behind bathroom door were not damaged.

There was a heavy burning in the partition between the living area and the kitchen, altho papers on the table top water heater, which was against the wall, were not scorched.

The kitchen equipment, which is all G.E. FRIGIDAIRE, and consisting of a Refrigerator, 3 burner stove and table top water heater, are in good shape, and show no sign of an electric short.

None of the furniture left in the apt. shows any fire damage.

The sheets on the one day bed, which had been made up, are not scorched, and have their original life.

2 Candles that were on buffet in dining area were melted.

A plastic curtain in the dressing room was in no way damaged by fire.

Furniture in apt. as follows:

2 day beds, one of which was made up for a bed;
A corner table between the 2 beds, on which were a fan, electric clock, which had stopped at 4:20, and a table model radio;
1 straight back chair
4 dining room chairs and a table
1 Buffet, on which were an Electric Fan and 2 Candlesticks;
Kitchen equipment (as set forth above).

In the Dressing Room was:

1 Chair and a Chest of Drawers;
A Mirror over the Chest of Drawers (Mirror was broken).

Not present in the house at the time of the examination, but which was reported as having been present at the time of the fire, were:

An overstuffed easy chair,
End Table,
Lamp.

The chair was destroyed by the fire, with the exception of the springs; the end table was destroyed with the exception of 2 small pieces of the legs; the legs are the bottom portions of the table and are hardly scorched.

The lamp was of a wooden standard which was burned off; the lamp shade was destroyed, but the lamp bulb would still burn and the hard rubber switch was not damaged.

Photographs and diagram made of this apt. to show damage and relative positions of the furniture.

INTERVIEWED [REDACTED] RELATIVE TO DISCOVERY OF FIRE: Stated she awakened after hearing a dull thud, such as the shutting of a door, at about 5 a.m., Monday, 7/2. She looked around outside, saw nothing of a suspicious nature and started back to bed.

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b7c

As she headed into the house she thought she smelled smoke, such as in the overheating of an electric motor, so she turned off her electric pump, then went back in the house and to bed.

Later she got up and brought the paper into the house; at this time she thought it odd that MRS. REESER was not up listening to her radio, as was her habit.

At this time she noticed nothing unusual and smelled no smoke.

She did not pay any attention to the apartment occupied by MRS. REESER.

At about 8 a.m. a WESTERN UNION boy came and inquired as to which apt. MRS. REESER was in; [REDACTED] took the telegram and went over to the apt., as she also wanted to take over the newspaper.

On arriving at the screen door she felt the door and as it was hot she called to the boy that something was wrong and for him to come and help her. The screen door was unlocked at this time.

The boy kept on walking to the Street so she called to some painters who were working across the Street; they came over and went into the apt. as she called the Fire Dept. and DR. REESER.

[redacted] did not enter the apt. or look in.

When asked about the door being opened, she stated that usually the door to the apt. was open but the screen door was locked.

INTERVIEW OF [redacted] FIRST PERSON TO LOOK INTO THE APT:

He stated that on hearing [redacted] call for help, he, in company of [redacted] ran across the Street to help her out.

She told them that there was a woman in the apt. [redacted] looked in at the bed across from the door and seeing no one lying on the bed, backed out and asked [redacted] to call the Fire Dept. He did not enter the apt. He further stated the bed had the appearance of having been slept in.

INTERVIEW OF [redacted] stated he entered the room after [redacted] looked in; he passed thru the entire house before seeing the remains of the deceased on his way back out.

Stated when he entered the apt. there was very little flame, but quite a bit of smoke.

In the hottest part of the fire he saw the springs from the chair and part of the lamp.

There were a few flames licking up thru the springs of the chair.

All he could see of the body was the lower part of one leg and a black satin shoe.

He noticed that the bed clothes of one of the beds was turned down and appeared as if someone had slept on it.

The ceiling light was on in the dressing room and he tried to turn it off, but the face plate on the switch was melted and he was afraid to touch it.

All that remained of the fire was a red smoldering mass.

These men both stated the heat was not what might be called INTENSE.

INTERVIEW OF ASST. FIRE CHIEF (S. O. GRIFFITH); on his arrival at scene there was a very small amount of smoke coming out of the screen door, which would hardly be noticed by an average person with no fire training. The inside was filled with smoke and he entered to open windows to allow the smoke to dissapate. The heat was not too intense and there was very little visible fire.

The fire was put out by a hand pump.

At the time he entered he did not see any of the body and it was not until he was on his way out that he saw the leg.

INTERVIEW OF [REDACTED] RELATIVE TO THE ACTIONS OF MRS. REESER: Mrs. Reeser rented the apt. the last day of May; she was a very congenial person and was considered an excellent tenant. MRS. REESER'S day seemed to revolve around her son, DR. RICHARD REESER.

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MRS. REESER'S usual day was composed of getting up rather early in the morning, usually before 6 a.m. and listening to the radio, washing her under-clothes, etc.

She would eat a hearty breakfast around 7-8 a.m. and wait until her son came over for his morning cup of coffee about 10 a.m. She would then leave to go down town to do her son's banking. She would come back home about 4 p.m., lie down and rest until dinner time, which she had at the Doctor's house. She would return home about 8 p.m., lie down with the lights out, listening to the radio, until she was ready to retire.

She was in the habit of taking some Seconal tablets before going to sleep.

SUNDAY night she came home about 4:30 p.m. and appeared slightly upset.

MRS. RICHARD REESER came over about 5-5:30 p.m. and stayed a short while. DR. REESER then came over about 8 p.m. and left in a short time.

[REDACTED] talked to MRS. REESER for a short time either just before the Doctor came, or shortly after he left.

At this time she was dressed in a rayon night-gown and black satin shoes.

She stated that she was a little upset and had taken 2 Seconals and was going to take 2 more a little later.

[REDACTED] was led to believe that she was upset over a family quarrel; however, she was a little disappointed about taking a trip back to her home.

[REDACTED] went over about 8:50 p.m. and was going to bring some ice cream back from the drug store for MRS. REESER but as she passed by the apt. she noticed the lights were out and the radio was turned off, so she decided not to wake her up.

This was the last she knew of MRS. REESER until she was found dead the next morning.

INTERVIEW OF DR. RICHARD REESER, JR: stated the family had gone to the Beach Sunday morning and returned home around 3:30 p.m. A short time after arriving home he found his Mother sitting in a chair crying. He asked what was wrong and she said she was feeling bad about not being able to take her trip North.

The reason for this was that the woman who was to come down and take his Mother North and find an apt. for her, had an accident and was unable to leave and that no apt. had been found.

He stated his Mother was independent and did not want to go up there and be a burden on anyone.

She asked the Dr. to take her home, and he said he would as soon as he had a shower; after taking a shower he found that his Mother had started to walk home, so he asked his wife to see if she could find his Mother and give her a ride the rest of the way.

DR. REESER went over to the apartment at about 8 p.m. to see if Mother and see if there was anything he could do for her. At the time he arrived she was sitting in her night-gown. She told him she had taken 2 Seconals and would take 2 more before retiring.

He left within a few minutes and did not see his Mother again.

He further stated that his Mother had an operation on her back about 10 years ago and it was difficult for her to move fast or get out of a deep chair.

MRS. REESER smoked some and usually used a Lighter (a lighter was found in her purse).

He did not know much about her financial circumstances as they were all handled thru a bank in COLUMBIA, PA.

He let her do most of his banking in order that she would have something to do in the day time.

INTERVIEW OF MRS. RICHARD REESER, JR: Stated she had gone over to her Mother-in-laws apt. Sunday evening about 5 p.m. and stayed just a short time.

She was unable to shed any light on the reason MRS. MARY REESER came home early Sunday.

She stated that the night-gown MRS. REESER wore was a VAN RAALTE Rayon Acetate with a stocking weave.

Missing is a rayon house coat, color black.

The chair that was burned was identified as one made by the HENDRYX BROS. INC., Style #137, Cover #1527 - Green - made of all/^{new}material consisting of cotton felt and inner spring unit.

EXAMINATION OF ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT: City Electricians examined electrical system in apt. and following facts obtained:

Only 1 fuse in the entire apt. was burned out and that was the fuse to the hot water heater.

There was no indication of a short in the outlet near the chair where the deceased was sitting; the insulation was burned off the wires, thru the conduit, but there was no sign of the wire having been fused or in any other way damaged.

There was no damage of any kind to the fuse box or sign of any high voltage or amperage overload.

None of the switches seemed damaged, altho the face plates were melted.

July Aug. 8, 1957

In the case of Mrs. Mary H. Reeser, deceased, 1200 Cherry Street-North, I know that this is one of the most publicized cases in the history of St. Petersburg. Due to that fact, the Detective Bureau has made every possible effort to find the facts surrounding the death of Mrs. Reeser; but the Police Dept. must consider this as an accident until such time as we can prove otherwise.

After a lengthy investigation and the receiving of the results of the examination from the F. B. I., we are making the following statement:

An examination of all specimens sent to the F.B.I. Laboratory for analysis shows no oxidizing chemicals, Petroleum Hydrocarbons, or other volatile fluids commonly used as accelerants or any chemical substances used to initiate or accelerate combustion. There is conclusive evidence that the deceased body could be consumed by fire, as in this case, if the body became ignited. We have had in the neighborhood of 100 cases quoted in personal letters of various opinions and suggestions. In order to clarify some of those suggestions we have disregarded the idea of lightning, although there was a slight electrical disturbance on that particular night. However, there is no indication in this case where lightning had struck this building in order to kill the victim and set the body afire; for in most cases, lightning leaves tell-tale evidence, either of entrance or exit.

Due to the fact Mrs. Reeser had taken a considerable amount of sedatives at night, and we do have evidence that she told her son, Dr. Richard Reeser, that she had taken two sedatives at 8:00 P.M. and was going to take two more, there is every possibility that Mrs. Reeser, while sitting in the overstuffed chair, could have become drowsy or fallen asleep while smoking a cigarette, thus igniting her clothes as at that time she was clad in a rayon acetate nightgown and a housecoat. The nightgown, being highly inflammable, could have been ignited by a burning cigarette, causing immediate death, if the deceased was in a semi-conscious condition. Naturally, when her clothes became afire, that would also set the chair afire creating intense heat which completely destroyed the chair and a nearby end table which was also completely destroyed except for a couple of small pieces of the legs which could have fallen outside of the fire area. Once the body became ignited, almost complete destruction occurred from the burning of its own fatty tissues, for once the body starts to burn, there is enough fat and other inflammable substances to permit varying amounts of destruction to take place. Sometimes this destruction by burning will proceed to a degree which results in almost complete combustion of the body, as in this case.

While such cases are not common, there are on record numerous instances of bodies burning with almost complete destruction. There is, however, no evidence from any of the cases on record to show that burning of this nature occurs other than when the body is ignited by some external means. The unusual aspects of such cases of burning have been heightened by the fact that in many instances little damage from burning occurred in the room or area directly surrounding the victim. In this case, the absence of any scorch or damage to furniture in the room can only be explained by the fact that heat liberated by the burning body has a tendency to rise and forms a layer of hot air which never came in contact with the furnishings on a lower level. This situation could have occurred, particularly if the fire had smoldered, rather than burned freely.

THE ABOVE INFORMATION HAS BEEN COMPILED AND HANDED OUT BY
CHIEF REICHERT AND LIEUTENANT BURGESS

Body Furnished Own Fuel

Book Confirms Finding

Yesterday, this reporter, found confirmation for the ready burning of human fat in the book "Homicide Investigation," by Dr. Le-Moyne Snyder, medico-legal director of the Michigan State Police and member of the American Medical Association and American Bar Association.

Snyder, trained both in medicine and law, states: "One would think that the human body would be very resistant to destruction by fire, but this is not actually the case. Underneath the skin is a layer of fat which may be quite thick in heavy individuals. This burns readily and the destruction of tissue after a comparatively small fire may be great . . . In many cases it seems the destruction of tissue by burning is out of all proportion to the intensity of fire which caused it."

This would confirm what police previously discounted. It also follows a theory outlined early in the case by Dr. Richard Reeser's wife, who told The Times that her mother-in-law's own tissue probably burned after she fell asleep in the chair while smoking.

The deceased was a heavy woman, weighing about 170 pounds. When found, however, all that was recognizably human was one foot—curiously intact—and still clad in one of the black slippers Mrs. Reeser customarily wore as house shoes.

Some Loose Ends

Despite the findings of the FBI, several unexplained angles still remain:

1. No odor of fire or burning flesh was ever detected by the landlady of the apartment or neighbors.
2. No time of death has ever been established, making it impossible to determine whether the blaze burned rapidly or smoldered all night.
3. No smoke was ever detected by neighbors or workmen in the area.

REPORTER'S OPINION: "While people may discuss the



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Reeser case at still greater length than has already been done, we must not overlook the tremendous amount of work poured into the baffling case by investigating officers. Police Chief Jake Reichert, Detective Lieut. Cass Burgess, Detectives R. H. Lee and Ross Boyd and others all did back-breaking



BURGESS

work. Whether the verdict convinces arm-chair sleuths or not, City police were not lax in their pursuit of answers.

Reeser Background

Police and firemen found the charred remains of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser, 67, at 3:07 a. m., July 2 in her apartment at 1200 Cherry Street Northeast. Although little damage was evident only human remains found were a skull, shrunken to the size of a cup, a piece of backbone and an intact left foot in a satin slipper. Her overstuffed chair was destroyed except for the coil springs.

Discovery was made as a telegram was delivered for Mrs. Reeser at 8:07 a. m. and the landlady, Mrs. P. M. Carpenter, went to give it to her. Mrs. Carpenter found the door hot and summoned the aid of two painters working across the street. It was then the blackened walls were first noticed and the few remains found. Firemen were called and extinguished last embers with a hand pump.

Mrs. Carpenter, who lived in an adjoining apartment, had been up, at five a. m. and six a. m. to get her newspaper, but had not noticed anything amiss. Smoke smelled at five a. m. was thought to be coming from an overheated water pump. Mrs. Carpenter turned off the pump and went back to bed.

The Western Union boy who delivered the telegram didn't notice any smoke, despite the fact the windows were open. A Times carrier boy who delivered papers to the area earlier in the morning also noticed nothing amiss.

Mrs. Reeser was seen by her son, Dr. Richard Reeser, his wife and the landlady, Sunday night, July 1, the last time at 9 p. m.

Reeser Death Accident - -

Sedative, Cigarette And Acetate Gown Support FBI Theory

EXCLUSIVE

By JERRY BLIZIN

St. Petersburg's "cinder woman mystery" was officially listed as accidental death in a statement issued late yesterday afternoon by Police Chief J. R. Reichert.

~~of Mrs. Handy Reeser, 67, whose body was destroyed July 2 in an intense blaze which did only~~



REICHERT

minor damage to her apartment at 1200 Cherry Street Northeast, was closed "unless new developments arise."

Reichert issued a lengthy statement yesterday based on a five-page report from the FBI laboratory, which spent three weeks probing materials from the fire scene and charred bits of the

woman's body.

In addition to a 500-word statement to the press, Reichert handed out a personal statement on the fire death, one of the most widely-publicized local tragedies in years.

Reichert's statement follows:

"This is the most unusual case I've seen during my almost 25 years of police work in the City of St. Petersburg. Since we have had hundreds of suggestions as to how this incident may have happened, I am not closing the door on the case yet.

"We are, however, holding the case in abeyance for any other information or developments that may come to our attention. The facts in the case have been checked from every possible angle, and I feel that the facts as given provide the answer to the death of Mrs. Reeser."

No Incendiary

Basically, the FBI report boils down to one salient fact: No evidence of any incendiary material or accelerant of any nature could be found in any of the materials tested.

The report said, however, that common combustible fluids and accelerants such as ether, alcohol, gasoline, etc. — would probably be consumed in such a fire and no trace of them detected afterward.

FBI analysts pointed out that the inflammability of human fatty tissue is intense, a fact little-known by most persons. Substances found in segments of the rug from the Reeser apartment were found to be melted human fat.



REESER

Police Statement

The Police Department's official statement, based on report, is as follows:

"An examination of all specimens sent to the FBI analysis shows no oxidizing chemicals, petroleum hydrocarbons or other volatile fluids commonly used as accelerants or substances used to initiate or accelerate combustion.

"There is conclusive evidence that the decedent could be consumed by fire, as in this case, if she had become ignited.

"We have had nearly 100 cases quoted in personals, various opinions and suggestions. In order to clarify suggestions we have disregarded the theory of lightning (there was a slight electrical disturbance on the part involved). There is no indication in this case where lightning struck the building in order to kill the victim and set the body on fire. Cases of lightning leaves tell-tale evidence, either of entrance or exit.

"Due to the fact Mrs. Reeser had taken a considerable amount of sedatives at night, and we do have evidence that her son, Dr. Richard Reeser, she had taken two second doses at 8 p. m. and was going to take two more, the possibility that Mrs. Reeser while sitting in the over-stuffed chair in her apartment, could have become drowsy or fallen asleep while smoking a cigarette, thus igniting her clothes.

Inflammable Gown

"At that time she was clad in a rayon acetate nightgown. The nightgown, being highly inflammable, could be ignited by a burning cigarette, causing immediate death. She ceased to be in a semi-conscious condition.

"Naturally, when her clothes became afire they set the chair afire creating intense heat which completely destroyed the chair and a nearby end table. Once the body became involved, most complete destruction occurred from the burning of fatty tissues. For once the body starts to burn, the fat and inflammable substances permit varying degrees of destruction to take place. Sometimes this destruction by fire proceeds to a degree which results in almost complete destruction of the body, as in this case.

"While such cases are not common, there are occasional instances of bodies burning with almost complete destruction. There is, however, no evidence from any of the cases that show that burning of this nature occurs other than what is ignited by some external means.

"The unusual aspects of such cases of burning have been explained by the fact that in many instances little damage occurred in the room or area directly surrounding the body.

Fire Only Smoldered

"In this case, the absence of any scorch or damage in the room can only be explained by the fact that the burning body has a tendency to rise and form a column of air which never came in contact with the furnishings at level. This situation could have occurred, particularly in a room smoldered, rather than burned freely."

In effect, this summation of findings by FBI pathologists and chemists, rules out spontaneous human combustion and explains the "level of heat mark" found on the Reeser apartment.

At the time her body was discovered, police found a line of black smoke and soot around the upper wall with buckled electrical wall switches and melted lower down on the same walls, outlet plugs were intact and unmarked by heat.

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI

DATE: 10/21/52

FROM : SAC, NEWARK (95-0)

95-41192

Mrs. Mary Hardy Roeser

ATTENTION: FBI LABORATORY

SUBJECT: *St. Petersburg, Florida*
October, 1952 Issue
Article Entitled "The Cinder Lady"

**Pageant May 21/52*
Goode

Mrs. Mary Hardy Roeser

[redacted], who resides at [redacted],

and is employed in the [redacted], appeared at the Camden Resident Agency with the magazine article set forth above and advised that after having read the article, he had typed up his own theory on the matter and wished the same to be made known to the FBI Laboratory in view of the reference made to the Laboratory in the article.

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[redacted] advised that he had sent a copy of his theory as enclosed to the Police Dept. at St. Petersburg, Fla., as well as to the writer of the article, Dr. WILTON MARION KROGMAN at the University of Pennsylvania.

ENCLOSURE - 1

EXPEDITE PROCESSING

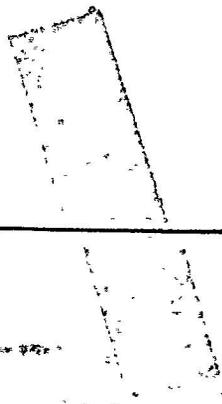
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ENCLOSURE

ENCLOSURE

95-41192-7

1 enclosure(s) to FBI LABORATORY, BUREAU

Newark File 95-0

Date 10/21/52



Ha... Made it! Now where am I?

The Strange Case of

THE CINDER LADY

BY DR. WILTON MARION KROGMAN
University of Pennsylvania

■ I AM A "bone detective," as well as a professor of physical anthropology. It is my special skill to identify human bones—either the whole skeleton or parts of it.

From the skeleton or its remains I can tell the age of a person at the time he died, his sex, and his race; it is also possible for me to estimate his height and body-build. From human bones I can often determine the cause of his death (the proverbial "blunt instrument," or a gunshot, or a knife, axe, cleaver or any other cutting weapon); how long the bones have been buried in the earth; and finally, if the skull is present, details about the living tissue and how the man looked.

In short, your skeleton is a dead give-away to what you were, and

who you were, during your lifetime.

I've been called in by the police and FBI to work on a number of murder and disappearance cases where only the bones were available—soft parts had decomposed, been eaten by acids or burned away.

But in 1951 I ran into a case which for sheer horror and bizarreness beat anything in my experience. The local police kept referring to it as "weird," "fantastic," "unbelievable," and even the conservative FBI ventured "unusual," "improbable." As for me, were I living in the middle ages I'd mutter something about "black magic" . . . But first let me outline the known facts.

At 9:00 P.M. on the night of July 1, 1951, Mrs. Mary Hardy

after I had entered into the case.

As I pondered this case the chords of memory began to hum a recognizable tune and I went to the library—I just knew that this was not an entirely unfamiliar scene. I found my answer in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, Chapter 32. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle are waiting to meet Mr. Krook.

"Mr. Guppy happens to look at his coat-sleeve. He stares at it, aghast [and says]:

"Why, Tony, what on earth is going on in this house tonight? Is there a chimney on fire? See how this soot's falling. See here, on my arm! Confound the stuff, it won't blow off—smears, like black fat!"

At the appointed hour they enter Mr. Krook's room together.

"The cat has retreated close (to the door) and stands snarling—not at them; at something on the ground before the fire. There is very little fire left in the grate, but there is a smouldering, suffocating vapour in the room, and a dark greasy coating on the walls and ceiling. The chairs and table, and the bottle so rarely absent from the table, all stand as usual.

"Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, seeming to be steeped in something . . . O Horror, he is here! . . .

"Call this death by any name you will, it is the same death eternally—inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the body itself—Spontaneous Combustion."

The foregoing theory is stoutly defended as fact by Dickens in the 1853 Preface to the first edition of *Bleak House*. He avers "that there are about 30 cases on record, of

which the most famous, that of the Countess Cornelia de Baudi Cese-nate, was minutely investigated . . ."

I searched further. I found that an English magazine, *The Saturday Magazine*, in August, 1832, ran an article called "Fire in the Human Body." It described the burning in 1731 of the lady cited by Dickens.

"This lady, who was in the sixty-second year of her age, retired to bed in her usual health. Here she spent above three hours in conversation with her maid, and in saying her prayers; and having at last fallen asleep, the door of her chamber was shut. As her maid was not summoned at the usual hour, she went into the bedroom to wake her mistress; but receiving no answer, she opened the window, and saw her corpse on the floor, in the most dreadful condition. At the distance of four feet from the bed there was a heap of ashes. Her legs, with stockings on, remained untouched, and the head, half-burned, lay between them. Nearly all the rest of the body was reduced to ashes. The air in the room was charged with floating soot. A small oil lamp on the floor was covered with ashes, but had no oil in it; and in two candlesticks, which stood upright upon a table, the cotton wick of both the candles was left, and the tallow of both had disappeared. It has been generally supposed that an internal combustion had taken place; that the lady had risen from her bed to cool herself, and that, in her way to open the window, the combustion had overpowered her, and consumed her body by a process in which no flame was produced."

I found that in 1763 the *Annual Register of the Royal Society of*

London reported the case of an elderly woman, gin-sodden, who was put to bed by a friend at 11:00 P.M. At 5:30 A.M. on the following morning smoke was seen coming out of the window; a small fire, easily put out, was on the floor. The body was badly burned, though "one leg and a thigh were still entire." It was said, "the people were amazed that the furniture had sustained so little injury . . . the feather-bed, the clothes, and covering were safe." In the room "the walls and everything in it were blackened"; the room "was filled with a very disagreeable vapour . . .".

I've presented pertinent detail in these cases (and there are many more) not so much to support theories of spontaneous or internal combustion—which are wholly untenable—as to point out an ever-recurring pattern:

1) The victim is usually a woman, in her 50's or 60's, of corpulent build;

2) The victim was addicted to a habit which induced helplessness (drink) or unconsciousness (a drug);

3) She was in the habit of smoking (pipe or cigarette) upon retiring; the burning occurred at night; the victim more than once fell asleep in a chair;

4) A candle (or candles) was in the room; the candle-substance was melted, but the wick was intact;

5) The burned (charred or ashed) remains were found on the floor, often near the room's center;

6) The main mass of the body was completely consumed, but head and extremities (hands, feet, fingers, toes) and occasionally vertebrae were often untouched;

7) The floor at the site of the burning showed some charring, but surrounding furniture, clothes and walls were unmarked;

8) The air was charged with oily or greasy soot and walls and ceiling were covered by this soot;

9) Often the residue (of bones or tissue) was oily and odorous.

I now want to point out some very serious problems—problems which strain belief beyond the breaking point.

First, and foremost, it takes a terrific heat to completely consume a human body (and I mean soft tissues plus skeleton). I have watched, in a crematorium, a body burn at 2000° F. for over eight hours—burn under the best possible conditions, with both the means of combustion (a furnace with excellent draft) and type of combustible (gas or oil). At the end of that time *there was scarcely a bone that was not present and completely recognizable as a human bone. It was not ashed or "powdered."* Only at 3000° F., plus, have I seen bone fuse—or melt, so that it ran and became volatile. These are very great heats—they would sear, char, scorch, or otherwise mar or effect anything and everything within a considerable radius.

Secondly, in my experience the human head is not left intact in such burning cases. Certainly it does not "shriveled," or symmetrically reduce, to a much smaller size. In the presence of heat sufficient to destroy soft tissues the skull explodes, literally, into many pieces.

Finally, I pose less tangible problems. The body is over 90 per cent water—perhaps even a little more in very fat people. I find it hard to

bone; a lump of charred tissue tentatively identified as liver; her left foot, with skin unburned and still shod in an unscorched black satin bedroom slipper; and the heat-eroded coil-springs of the chair;

3) The windows were partly open and the door was not sealed;

4) The wall paint nearest to the chair, and the floor in the immediate vicinity, was only slightly scorched;

5) Electric light plugs and fixtures in the soot area on the walls had melted, but base-plugs lower down had not; no fuses had been blown and the electric current was on, and working;

6) Two candles standing on the window sill had melted but curiously their wicks were intact;

7) Newspapers on a nearby table were not scorched and neither was the bedding on a day bed;

8) An electric clock had stopped at 4:20 (presumably A.M.), but when plugged in at the baseboards it ran O.K.;

9) There was absolutely no evidence of any inflammable materials (kerosene, gasoline, etc.) at or near the site of burning;

10) While the room was intensely hot, there were no flames, no embers, no collection of sticky or viscous material on the site;

11) There is no record, during the night, of any smoke, any heat-crackle, or any nauseous or unusual odor escaping from the room.

As I mentioned earlier I've worked on a number of human burning cases. To understand what happens to the human body, I've done some experimentation using both animal and human cadavers. I've burned bones still encased in

flesh; I've burned "green" bones—bones stripped of flesh, but not dried out; I've burned dried bones. I've used all sorts of combustibles, ranging from a hickory and oak fire (said to be the hottest "natural" fire), through coal, oil, gasoline, to an electric muffle furnace. I carefully observe how the bone behaves during burning and how it looks when it has cooled off.

As a result I have formulated a basic principle: "*The destruction of animal or human tissue is a function of the conditions of combustion, rather than of the type of combustible used.*" By this I mean that without a brisk draft (the free passage of air) the fire will be smothered, no matter how inflammable the combustible used.

What earthly circumstances and causes could have led to such complete destruction of Mrs. Reeser? Lightning? Local Weather Bureau records showed that no storm had occurred on the night of July 1. Could it have been an electrical induction current, passing through the body, caused by faulty wiring? But I've already noted that the wiring was intact, for the electric clock ran O.K. when plugged in. Was it by spontaneous or "internal" combustion—that is, a fire starting in the body tissues *without any external cause*? But this is impossible! The fluids and fats of the human body simply do not contain the chemicals which might ignite all by themselves. Could she have perished so completely from just a dropped cigarette? Or was she burned elsewhere, then "planted" in the room? These are all "hunches," or "theories," that occurred to the local police, and to me a few weeks later



Some ash, some oily soot, a foot,
and fragments of backbone . . . no
more was left of the Cinder Lady. Did
she vanish by black magic? Go
up in spontaneous combustion? Burn
in a heat hotter than hellfire?
Why was the rest of the room unscorched?
A world-famous bone detective
spins his theories after months of
research and tracking clues

Reeser, aged 67 years, and 175 pounds heavy, was last seen alive in her one room apartment, in a four-apartment building in St. Petersburg, Florida. Mrs. Reeser was the widow of a doctor who had practiced near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in the heart of the "Pennsylvania Dutch" region.

On the fatal night she and her landlady were the only people in the building. The last time anyone saw her, Mrs. Reeser was sitting in an over-stuffed chair, a bit off the center of the room, wearing a rayon acetate nightgown and a housecoat. She was smoking a cigarette. She was known to take several sleeping tablets before retiring. The room was of moderate size with a couple of windows.

At 8:00 A.M. next morning, the landlady took a telegram up to Mrs. Reeser's room. She grasped the doorknob but found it too flaming hot to hold. Two painters working in the building forced the door and were met by a blast of hot air. Their startled gazes met a scene macabre beyond words:

1) The walls from a level of about four feet above the floor, and the ceiling, were festooned with a greasy soot which gave off a "peculiar odor";

2) Where Mrs. Reeser had been sitting were only ashed and charred remains. They included a roundish object identified as the head, and varyingly described as big as a "baseball," or a "teacup" or a "grapefruit"; a few pieces of back-

believe that a human body, once ignited, will literally consume itself—burn itself out, as does a candlewick, guttering in the last residual pool of melted wax. When human flesh burns it gives off an acrid, evil-smelling odor, especially if burning free in a room or in the open. How could 175 pounds of mortal flesh burn with no detectable or discernible smoke or odor permeating the entire building?

Just what *did* happen on the night of July 1, 1951, in St. Petersburg, Florida? We may never know, though the case still haunts me. The "Cinder Lady" is now part of our folklore. It couldn't happen, but it did. That's the way the St. Petersburg police and I felt about it. Police Chief J. R. Reichert issued a statement six weeks after the burning, as follows:

"According to her son, Mrs. Reeser habitually took two sleeping pills before retiring. There is every possibility that, while seated in the over-stuffed chair, she became drowsy or fell asleep while smoking a cigarette, thus igniting her clothes.

"At that time she was clad in a

rayon acetate nightgown and a housecoat (according to her son, who had visited her the evening of July 1). The nightgown, being highly inflammable, could have been ignited by the cigarette, burst into flame, causing almost immediate death to a person in a semi-conscious condition.

"Once the body became ignited, almost complete destruction could have resulted from the burning of its own fatty tissues (Mrs. Reeser was a heavy woman, weighing 175 pounds), an uncommon but entirely possible occurrence according to FBI analysis.

"In this case, the absence of any scorch or damage to furniture in the room can only be explained by the theory that heat liberated by the burning body rose to form a layer of hot air which darkened the upper walls and ceiling of the room but never came in contact with walls or objects at a lower level."

Logical and scientific as this sounds, he came closer to truth when he concluded, "The case is not closed and may never be to the satisfaction of all concerned." ■■

SEAT OF LEARNING



■ TOMMY WAS AT HIS FATHER'S SIDE. "Daddy," he asked, "what was the name of the great American traitor in the Revolutionary War?"

"I don't know," replied his father.

"Who was Vice President under Harding?"

"Gosh, I forget."

"Well, then," Tommy tried again, "do you know where Monticello is?"

"No," replied his father, after a moment's deliberation.

"Gee, Pop," said the boy, "you don't mind my asking you, do you?"

"Of course not," replied Daddy. "How else are you going to learn things?"

—Helen S. Mann

OFF-GUARD

BY LUCIEN AIGNER

■ FOR MORE THAN 25 years as a photographer I roamed three continents hunting for celebrities in off-guard moments. My purpose was not so much to discover their weaknesses—which I also had done—but to show the human being behind the pose of the public figure. Here are four pages of the best, with my comments.



I caught a wistful Churchill after a personal election victory in the '30s in his constituency.

Please forward to Washington, D.C. office of F.B.I.

b6
b7c

October 13th, 1952

Dear Sirs:-

In regards to the article that appeared in the October 1952 issue of Pageant magazine I must say that it set me to thinking seriously concerning "The Strange Case of the Cinder Lady" along the following lines;-----

We know that certain diseases very definitely raise the temperature of our bodies from the normal of 98.6° up to 112° at times, although seldom reaching the higher figure. Too, that we do not know all that there is to be known concerning diseases. Also, that it is quite possible that there might be some diseases that are as yet totally unknown to us, which fact also applies to forms of diseases. Too, I take it that the article of the "Cinder Lady" is all true fact.

So much for the known facts.

Now for the theory, thus:-

Could it be that there is some disease, or some form of cancer that is entirely unknown to us at the present time, that enters the bodies of certain people and lays there semidormant, but developing, slowly, but surely for an unknown length of time without any symptoms showing --- until, as in the cases cited in "The Strange Case of the Cinder Lady", this disease, or form of cancer is triggered off into extremely violent activity, and in its violence it raises the person's temperature to heights far in excess of anything known to us now, possibly up to 700° or 1000°, whereupon chemical reaction takes over, and raises the body temperature up to 10000° or 15000°, which would totally consume the body in a very short time.

In so doing the disease would be preying on the human body even after death and possibly even also preying upon itself, at the higher temperatures.

Too, the chemical reactions within the body would not all be oxidation, but quite possibly would go to prepare it for the oxidation taking place on the exterior, where the greater amount of oxygen is, and the excessive temperatures therein generated so accelerating the rate of external oxidation that the body would be consumed within an hour and a half from the time that the violent activity of the disease was triggered off.

Also, as in a storage battery this chemical activity could possibly set up electrical currents, which would in circulating within the body also raise the temperature, due to the resistance of the various parts of the body.

Obviously any person so afflicted would be unconscious at 107° and certainly dead at 150°. So that he, or she would obviously suffer very little, if any at all, because these temperatures would have been reached and passed so very rapidly, in such a case, that there would be a minimum chance for suffering to take place.

I feel that it would be a very excellent idea, that the next time such an event occurs, that several medical ~~medical~~ experts get on the scene immediately and have everything in the room left exactly as when it occurred, and then the experts move into the building with a set of electron microscopes, a vast multitude of slides, etc. and put all soot, grease, ashes, parts, dust, etc. on the slides, all being labeled, in full detail, and preserved for their present and future examination to find out the cause, and, if possible, establish my theory. Allowing no one but the scientists to touch anything, until the scientists are through.

Who knows what might be turned up to help us in this matter, and/or other matters?

Yours Truly

95-41192-7

To the F. B. I.

Comden, N. J. Office
in Post Office Bldg
4th and Market Sts
Comden, N. J.

To be forwarded to
Washington, D. C. office

SEARCHED
SERIALIZED
INDEXED
FILED

APR 19 1954
FBI - WASHINGTON

9174

January 5, 1955

RECORDED-125
INDEXED-125

[Redacted]

Technical-Authors Publishing House
Bismark Street 21
(20b) Einbeck, Germany

Dear [Redacted]

The letter which [Redacted] and you sent to this Bureau on December 10, 1954, has been received.

In connection with your inquiry, the FBI conducted laboratory examinations concerning the death of Mrs. Mary H. Reaser of St. Petersburg, Florida. These examinations were done at the request of Mr. Jacob R. Reichert, Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Florida, and the results were furnished to Chief Reichert. Investigation of the case as such was not handled by the FBI but was conducted by the St. Petersburg, Florida, Police Department. It is, therefore, suggested that you communicate directly with Chief Reichert for what assistance he may be able to give you.

It is also suggested that you write to the editors of the "Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science," published by the Northwestern University School of Law, Chicago, Illinois, for information appearing in that publication.

Sincerely yours,

John Edgar Hoover
Director

COMM - FBI
JAN 6 - 1955
MAILED 24

cc - Liaison Representative, with copy of incoming.
Heidelberg, Germany

cc - Foreign Liaison Desk, with copy of incoming.

ELT:rcw:les
(5)

(See next page for note.)

- Tolson _____
- Boardman _____
- Nichols _____
- Belmont _____
- Harbo _____
- Mohr _____
- Parsons _____
- Rosen _____
- Tamm _____
- Sizoo _____
- Winterrowd _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holloman _____
- Gandy _____

RECEIVED READING ROOM
FBI
JAN 6 12 50 PM '55

60 JAN 20 1955

NOTE: Bureau file 95-41192 reflects that the FBI Laboratory conducted examinations into the death of Mrs. Mary H. Reeser of St. Petersburg, Florida. Mrs. Reeser died as a result of a fire. Address of the "Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science" per Bureau Library.

Scotland Yard in London, the Surete in Paris and the Federal Criminal Office in Germany have, likewise, promised us their support.

We will reimburse you for expenses involved.

Respectfully,

Technical-Authors Publishing House



b6
b7C

P. S. -- Moreover, the Court Chemist in Cleveland, , allegedly made a compilation of cases of this type in the "Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science" a few years ago. Perhaps it would be possible to put this compilation at our disposal or perhaps it could be purchased for us over there. W. L.

TRANSLATION FROM GERMAN

"DER TERMIN-ARTIKEL" (Term-Articles)
Technical Editorial Work for Newspapers and Magazines
Technical Lectures for Broadcasting

[redacted] member of Journalist Union in Lower Saxony, #234
[redacted] member of the Protective Union of German Authors, #603

[redacted]

[redacted] 12/10/54
Mary H. Reeser
to

USA
FBI of the USA
Washington

Re: Criminal Case Mrs. REESER, St. Petersburg, Florida.

Highly esteemed Gentlemen,

The above-mentioned case was investigated by the FBI at the time. We know, no conclusive explanation was found. Mention was made that it concerned one of those rare cases of "self-cremation" which occurred quite frequently in former centuries but which never have been explained satisfactorily.

We are planning to publish, in conjunction with noted scientists, a larger work about these mysterious self-cremations and ask you to kindly assist us with material. Of this case, we need a photograph of the woman who was burned to ashes in her room (it was produced at that time and should be in your file).

You certainly could cause, out of "love" for the matter, a copy to be made from the film. Furthermore, it is important that we have a report of the facts as well as of your own conclusions. Here, too, copies will suffice. We would be indebted to you if you could help us with our work by putting the above material at our disposal in the very near future.

mm
ack 1/5/55
EAT

RECORDED-125

95-41192-8

7 JAN 7 1955

BRINTON

In- und ausländische Korrespondenten

Der Teufel-Artikel · FACHSCHRIFTSTELLERISCHE ARBEITEN FÜR TAGES- UND ZEITSCHRIFTENPRESSE
FACHVORTRÄGE FÜR RUNDFUNKSENDUNGEN

U.S.A.
Bundeskriminalamt der USA
Washington

9175

[Redacted] Mitglied des Verbands
der Journalisten in Niedersachsen, Nr. 234
[Redacted] Mitglied des Schriftverbands
[Redacted] (20b) [Redacted] [Redacted] 10.12.54
Telefon: 206
WL/RW

Betr.: Kriminalfall Frau Reeser, St. Petersburg (Florida),
vom 1. zum 2. Juli 1951

Sehr geehrte Herren,

Der obengenannte Fall ist seinerzeit auch vom Bundeskriminalamt der USA in Washington untersucht worden. Wie uns bekannt ist, wurde eine endgültige Klärung nicht gefunden. Es wird davon gesprochen, daß es sich dabei um jene seltenen Fälle von "Selbstverbrennungen von Menschen" handelt, die in früheren Jahrhunderten sehr oft vorkamen, die aber niemals eine restlose Klärung fanden.

Wir haben die Absicht über diese mysteriösen Selbstverbrennungen im Zusammenhang mit namhaften Wissenschaftlern eine größere Arbeit herauszugeben und bitten Sie um Unterstützung mit Material. In diesem Falle benötigen wir ein Foto von der zu Asche verbrannten Frau in ihrem Zimmer (es wurde seinerzeit hergestellt und dürfte bei Ihren Akten liegen). Sicherlich können Sie der Sache zur Liebe von dem Film für uns einen Abzug herstellen lassen. Ferner wäre uns an dem Tatsachenbericht über den Fall und Ihrer eigenen Stellungnahme gelegen. Auch hier benötigten wir lediglich die Abschriften. Wir wären Ihnen sehr zu Dank verpflichtet, wenn Sie uns bei unserer Arbeit durch baldige Zurverfügungstellung obigen Materials helfen könnten.

Scotland Yard in London, die Sureté in Paris und das Bundeskriminalamt in Deutschland haben uns ebenfalls ihre Unterstützung zugesagt.

Die entstehenden Unkosten werden wir Ihnen ersetzen.

Hochachtungsvoll!
Fachschriftsteller-Verlag

[Redacted signature area]

PS. Der Gerichtschemiker in Cleveland, [Redacted] vor einigen Jahren im "Journal of Criminal Law, Cr. Police Science", Fälle dieser Art zusammengestellt, leicht ist es möglich, uns diese Zusammenstellung zu stellen oder für uns dort zu kaufen.

May 26, 1955

RECORDED - 72

INDEXED - 72

EX-116



b6
b7C

Dear Mr.

Thank you for your letter of May 18, 1955, in which you inquired regarding the Reeser Case which occurred in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1951.

In connection with your inquiry, the FBI conducted laboratory examinations concerning the death of Mrs. Mary H. Reeser. These examinations were done at the request of Mr. Jacob D. Reichert, Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Florida, and the results were furnished to him. Investigation of this case was handled by his department.

The FBI Laboratory conducts examinations at the request of duly authorized law enforcement agencies, and we treat such examinations as confidential. Any information concerning this case would have to be obtained from Chief Reichert, and I trust you will understand my position.

Sincerely yours,

John Edgar Hoover
Director

Handwritten signature

- Tolson _____
- Boardman _____
- Nichols _____
- Belmont _____
- Harbo _____
- Mohr _____
- Parsons _____
- Rosen _____
- Tamm _____
- Sizoo _____
- Winterrowd _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holloman _____
- Gandy _____

CC - Miami, with copy of incoming.

ATTENTION SAC: The Reeser Case was unique in that Mrs. Reeser was found burned to death in a chair in her living room. The body was almost completely consumed; however, surrounding furniture in the room was not damaged. (95-41192)

JUN 6 1955
GEM:klh
(4)

MAILED 8
MAY 26 1955
COMM-FBI

Handwritten notes and signatures

Mr. J. Gormley Room 7407

WEAT-TV

112,000 WATTS
ABC PRIMARY

P.O. BOX 70

West Palm Beach, Florida

VHF
CHANNEL

12

PLEASE REPLY TO:

5/18/55

Information Office,
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D.C.

Gentlemen:-

Mary H. Reeser

I'm thinking seriously of writing a book or long article on the Reeser Case which occurred some years ago in St. Petersburg, Florida. It was the case where the woman was completely consumed by some force while in the kitchen of her home, and yet nothing else was damaged in the room.

Police Chief Reichert of St. Petersburg wrote me that the Police records of the case would not be available for note taking by "any individual from a news standpoint." In his letter he says: "Based on the reports received from the Fire Underwriters in Chicago and the laboratory tests made in Washington by the F.B.I. we believe sufficient grounds have been established to justify closing the case."

Do you folks put out a report on the case? Are the tests you made, the results that is, available to the public? Is there any way I can get any information from you as to your part in the tests in the case? I'll certainly appreciate any information you can give me.

Very truly yours

95-41192-

RECORDED - 72

EX-1

WEAT-TV

MAY 23 1955

MAY 23 1955

Vertical stamp: MAY 23 1955 and other illegible markings.

clp

mul. rack GEM 5-25-55

1 auto made 5-25-55 pp

JBR/ek

WEAT RADIO • 850 on your dial • 1000 watts • NBC

Handwritten signature

REC-34
EX-105

95-41192 — 10

March 2, 1962



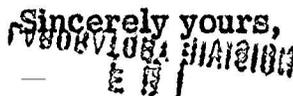
Dear 

Reference is made to your letter of February 22, 1962, requesting information concerning the Mary Hardy Reeser case or similar types of cases.

The FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in this case received from the Chief of Police at St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of this matter. Examinations made by the Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated, however, on a confidential basis, and I am not at liberty to make public the results of these examinations.

You may wish to correspond with the editors of the "Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science," published by the Northwestern University School of Law, Chicago, Illinois. I understand they published an article by Lester Adelson on cases of this type a number of years ago. They may be able to help you in this study.

MAILED 31
MAR 2 1962
COMM-FBI

Sincerely yours,


John Edgar Hoover
Director
RECEIVED - COMM

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- DeLoach _____
- Evans _____
- Malone _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Ingram _____
- Gandy _____

RHJ:FCP
REC-114
(4)

MAR 19 1962

(see addendum next page)

MAIL ROOM TELETYPE UNIT

b6
b7c

Letter to

b6
b7C

ADDENDUM:

Laboratory received evidence in this case from J. R. Reichert, Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Florida, on 7/10/51, relative to the unusual death of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser. She had been almost completely cremated in her apartment, although the damage to her apartment was not commensurate with her condition. Laboratory examinations revealed no accelerants in the evidence submitted. No information in Bufiles identifiable with

February 22nd, 1962

Federal Bureau of Investigation Laboratory
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

I am writing this letter as the spokesman of a curious Physics class. During the course of our studies we ran across an old newspaper clipping with a story concerning the "spontaneous combustion of human bodies." This particular article dealt with the case of a Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser of St. Petersburg, Florida. Pursuing the case, we wrote to the St. Petersburg Times for any possible follow-ups or solution to the case. We received the articles but no solution. One of the stories said that investigation was being carried on by the D.B.9 laboratory in Washington concerning the mystery. I was appointed spokesman for the class to see if your laboratory could graciously give these results to the class. We are particularly interested in the Reeser case, but any information on parallel cases will be welcomed. If, because of some law, you are not allowed to reveal names, we will understand the deletion of same. The Reeser case happened in July 1, 1951 at St. Petersburg, Florida. Thanking you sincerely for your co-operation in the case, I am

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FEB 21 1 11 PM '62
F. B. I.
MAR 19 40 A

Public
3/26/62
R157 F99

53 54 .25

REC-34

95-41197-9510

EX-105

FEB 20 1962
MAR 20 1962

REC'D - CORR
FEB 21 1962

Send information to:

CORRESPONDENCE

SAC, Philadelphia (89-100)

June 3, 1957

Director, FBI

95-41192-

UNSUB; Mrs. Anna Martin -
Victim - MURDER;
Police Cooperation,
Philadelphia PD

For the assistance of Captain [redacted] Homicide Squad, Philadelphia, there is set forth below the information furnished to Mr. J. R. Reichert, Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Florida, in the case of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser, deceased.

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In way of explanation, the St. Petersburg Police received their report of a fire in which the deceased was burned to death, the cause of the fire being unknown. The body of the deceased was rather completely cremated with the exception of the left foot which was burned in two, about four inches above the ankle. The left shoe worn by the deceased was still intact. The chair in which she was sitting was completely burned away, leaving just the springs. A small end table was completely burned with the exception of two legs. The floor carpet was burned in an area of approximately three feet in diameter. The apartment where she resided showed signs of extreme heat on the ceiling, and walls approximately four feet from the floor. Plastic light switches had melted but floor plugs were unharmed. Mrs. Reeser was described as 5' 7" weighing 170 pounds. When last seen on the evening prior to the discovery of her body, she was wearing a rayon acetate nightgown with a stocking weave. Her black rayon house-coat could not be found. Various items were submitted for Laboratory examination with the request for information or theory which could explain how a human body could be so destroyed and the fire confined to such a small area with so little damage to the structure of the building and the furniture of the room.

"An examination of (the) specimens... showed the presence of no oxidizing chemicals, petroleum hydrocarbons or other volatile fluids commonly used as accelerants, or any chemical substances used to initiate or accelerate combustion. The greasy

YELLOW
DUPLICATE
JUN 3 1957
MAILED 5

JUN 14 1957

File 95-41192
[Signature]

ORIGINAL COPY FILED IN

**Letter to Philadelphia
Unsub; Mrs. Anna Martin - Victim
Murder - Police Cooperation
Philadelphia PD**

substance which saturated several of these specimens... was found to be human fat. The absence of any traces of volatile inflammable fluids does not preclude, of course, the possibility that such fluids were used in destroying the body of the deceased. Because of their very nature, gasoline, ether, and similar inflammable fluids are consumed ordinarily in the early stages of a fire. Where there has been almost complete combustion, as in this case, it would be most unlikely to find such fluids even though they had been present at the beginning of the fire.

"As regards the destruction of the deceased's body which occurred in this case it is entirely possible that the body was consumed to the extent shown in the photographs and as indicated by the bone fragments and other debris without the aid of any such material as gasoline. It is not generally realized the extent to which the human body can burn once it becomes ignited. While such cases are not common, there are on record numerous instances of bodies burning with almost complete destruction. It was formerly believed that such cases arose from spontaneous combustion or the burning was sometimes attributed to preternatural causes. There is, however, absolutely no evidence from any of the cases on record to show that burning of this nature occurs other than when the body is ignited by some external means. The unusual aspects of such cases of burning have been heightened by the fact that in many instances little damage from burning occurred in the room

**Letter to Philadelphia
Unsub; Mrs. Anna Martin - Victim
Murder - Police Cooperation
Philadelphia PD**

or area directly surrounding the victim. As in this case, the remains of the victim were found reclining in the wreckage of a chair, sofa, bed or in one instance sitting on a stairway. In the last-named case the victim was a woman who had been clad in rather voluminous garments. Not a vestige of clothing was found remaining in that case although no extensive damage was done to the stairs.

"As indicated above, these cases are explained by the fact that the body becomes ignited from some outside cause such as burning clothing, a burning mattress, chair or other means. Once the body starts to burn there is enough fat and other inflammable substances to permit varying amounts of destruction to take place. Sometimes this destruction by burning will proceed to a degree which results in almost complete combustion of the body.

"In this case, the absence of any scorching or damage to furniture in the room can only be explained by the fact that heat liberated by the burning body had a tendency to rise and formed a layer of hot air which never came in contact with the furnishings on a lower level. This situation would have occurred particularly if the fire had smoldered rather than burned freely."

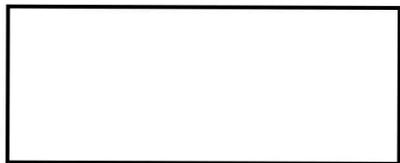
The information set forth above was obtained by us from several texts in the field of Forensic Medicine. It has come to our attention that one of Cleveland made a compilation of

b6
b7c

Letter to Philadelphia
Unsub; Mrs. Anna Martin - Victim
Murder - Police Cooperation
Philadelphia PD

cases of this type in the "Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology
and Police Science." Possibly, reference to this journal or
communication with the publishers may locate this compilation.

- Mr. Tolson
- Mr. Belmont
- Mr. Mohr
- Mr. Casper
- Mr. Callahan
- Mr. Conrad
- Mr. DeLoach
- Mr. Evans
- Mr. Gale
- Mr. Rosen
- Mr. Sullivan
- Mr. Tavel
- Mr. Trotter
- Tele. Room
- Miss Holmes
- Miss Gandy



July 15, 1963

Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Hoover:

I am a free lance magazine writer presently preparing an article for True Magazine dealing with an investigation of a St. Petersburg, Florida, woman's death in which the FBI and its laboratory played a part. I am hoping you will be able to provide for me some information dealing with this case.

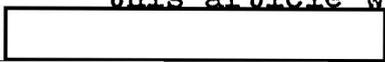
The case in question death with the death on July 2, 1951, of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser, 67, a widow, of 1200 Cherry Street Northeast, St. Petersburg, Florida. On that night (July 1-2) Mrs. Reeser was consumed in her apartment by a fire of unknown origin that reduced her body from 175 pounds to less than 10 pounds, yet did substantially little damage to the apartment itself.

Police Chief J. R. Reithert requested (and received) the assistance of the FBI, its agents, pathologists and FBI Lab. Scrapings from the carpet, metal from Mrs. Reeser's chair, ashes and the mortal remains of Mrs. Reeser were individually boxed and taken to the FBI Lab for microanalysis. Many aspects of the case were so strange that even the FBI ventured that the case was "unusual and improbable."

After weeks of investigation, the FBI issued a report which declared that there was no evidence that any kind of inflammable fluids, volatile liquids, chemicals or other accelerants had been used to set the widow's body ablaze and there was no evidence of homicide in the death.

My research thus far indicates that Mrs. Reeser may have fallen victim to a very rare and curious malady -- a natural phenomenon, actually -- known among medical men as Spontaneous Human Combustion (SHC) or Preternatural Combustibility (PC). I have unearthed over 50 similar cases in the course of this research, but not any other so thoroughly and competently investigated as this.

What I would appreciate learning from you in order to keep this article wholly accurate throughout, is simply:



oml

OCR Mailing List

Handwritten: F-9, Johnson

Vertical: 100-2-991-4-3

Vertical: ORIGINAL FBI FILE

Vertical: 100-44200, JUL 17 1963

100-44192-
NOT RECORDED
JUL 30 1963

7-15-63

1. The identity of the FBI agents who investigated this case at the scene in St. Petersburg; in particular, the pathologists of the FBI who were on hand there.
2. The identity of the FBI pathologists who performed the extensive and thorough investigation and analysis of the specimens submitted to the FBI Laboratory.
3. A transcript, if possible, of the findings of this team, as reported to the FBI Headquarters.
4. The identity of the individual in charge of this investigation.
5. Finally, a brief description of any other case of similar nature in which the FBI, its agents, pathologists and Laboratory may have played a part.

Very little of a concrete nature is known regarding this phenomenon and its manifestation. Any light you may be able to shed upon it, therefore, would be deeply appreciated and would, of course, be of tremendous assistance in maintaining thorough accuracy throughout the article.

Should you wish to check upon my background in this matter, the following sources or persons may be able to supply you with what you need.

The Society of Magazine Writers, Overseas Press Club, 54 W. 40th Street, of which I am a member.

[redacted] my agent. ^{b6}
_{b7c}

[redacted]
[redacted] with whom I have been working on this piece.

It may further be of interest to you that I was for four years, police reporter of the [redacted] newspaper and was often in contact with the Dayton FBI office and frequently met with the assistance and cooperation of Mr. Ed Mason, FBI agent in charge of the Cincinnati office.

Since I am working under pressure of a deadline, I would appreciate your prompt attention and reply.

[redacted]

95-41192-11

May 8, 1964

104



MAY 8 4 29 PM '64
FBI
READING ROOM

Dear

Your letter dated May 5th has been received.

In response to your inquiry regarding the case of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser, the FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in this case received from the Chief of Police at St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of this matter. Examinations made by our Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated, however, on a confidential basis and I am not at liberty to make public the results of these examinations.

Handwritten initials

Sincerely yours,

J. Edgar Hoover

John Edgar Hoover
Director

MAILED 20
MAY 11 1964

Handwritten checkmark

Handwritten initials and signatures

NOTE: Correspondent is not identifiable in Bufiles. See D. C. Morrell to Mr. DeLoach memorandum dated 5-8-64 captioned "'The Baffling Burning Death' by Allan W. Eckert, True Magazine, May, 1964."

DCL:kcf (3)

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- DeLoach _____
- Evans _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holmes _____
- Gandy _____

Handwritten signatures and initials

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Handwritten signature

56 MAY 19 1964

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TRUE COPY



May 5, 1964

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

According to an article from True Magazine, entitled "the Baffling, Burning Death," you have files on a deceased woman, Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser (Reeser) I only know that she lived in a four-apartment building at 1200 Cherry Street, St. Petersburg, Florida and that she was 67-year-old widow at the time of her death on July 2, 1951.

If it is possible, I would like all the information that is available on her death and on the investigation which followed it. If you have any information which you can send me, it must be done so before May 29, 1964.

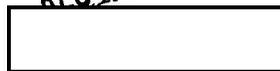
Thank you very much for your time and service.

Sincerely,

95-4192-11

15 MAY 12 1964

REC-104



J del

*ack 5-8-64
DCI/klf
1-TC
5-7-64/dch
messell to DeLoach
5-8-64
OCC/klf*



May 5, 1964

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C.

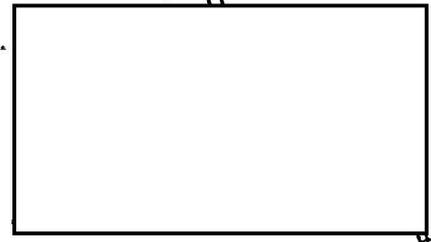
Dear Sir:

According to an article from True Magazine, entitled "The Baffling, Burning Death," you have files on a deceased woman, Mrs. Mary Hardy Reser. (Reser) I only know that she lived in a four-apartment building at 1200 Cherry Street, St. Petersburg, Florida and that she was a 67-year-old widow at the time of her death on July 2, 1951.

If it is possible, I would like all the information that is available on her death and on the investigation which followed it. If you have any information which you can send me, it must be done so before May 29, 1964.

Thank you very much for your time and service.

Sincerely,



CORRESPONDENCE

ack 5-8-64
DCI/klf
mme
Morse to Desback
5-8-64 DCI/klf

ITC 5-7-64 del

esa

July 19, 1963

95-41192-



Dear [Redacted]

I have received your letter of July 15th requesting information concerning the Mary Hardy Reeser case which occurred in 1951.

Investigation of this matter as such was not handled by this Bureau, but was conducted by the Saint Petersburg, Florida, Police Department. The FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence received from Mr. Jacob R. Reichert, then Chief of Police, and the results were furnished to him. Examinations made by the Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated on a confidential basis, and I am not at liberty to make these public. It is suggested you may wish to communicate directly with Mr. Harold C. Smith, current Chief of the Saint Petersburg Police Department, for what assistance he may be able to give you.

MAILED 6
JUL 19 1963
COMM-FBI

You may also wish to correspond with the editors of the "Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science," published by the Northwestern University School of Law, Chicago, Illinois. I understand an article by Lester Adelson on cases of the type you are interested in appeared in this publication a number of years ago. You may be able to use this source for help in the preparation of your article.

Sincerely yours,
L. Edgar Hoover

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- DeLoach _____
- Evans _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holmes _____
- Gandy _____

1 - Cincinnati - Enclosure

NOTE: Correspondent is on the mailing list to receive the Uniform Crime Reports. Bufiles indicate a very limited prior correspondence with him, while he was a police reporter for the [Redacted] which was in response to similar requests for help in preparation of articles. The Laboratory received evidence in the particular case on 7-10-51, relative to the unusual death of Mrs. Mary H. Reeser. She had been almost completely cremated in her apartment, although damage to her residence was not commensurate with her condition. Laboratory examinations revealed no accelerants in the evidence submitted. The response to [Redacted] letter was discussed with the Laboratory Division.

HHA:cho (6) MAIL ROOM TELETYPE UNIT

REC'D-READING ROOM
F B I

722 JUL 19 1963 4:18 PM-627-3-46

CASPER - 627-3-46

[Handwritten initials]

May 8, 1964

REC-10

95-41192-12



Dear

Your letter dated May 5th, requesting information concerning the case of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser or similar types of cases, has been received.

The FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in connection with Mrs. Reeser's death received from the Chief of Police in St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of this matter. Examinations made by our Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated, however, on a confidential basis, and I am not at liberty to make public the results of such examinations.

Enclosed are booklets about the FBI which I hope you and your classmates enjoy reading.

Sincerely yours,

J. Edgar Hoover

John Edgar Hoover
Director

MAILED 8
MAY 11 1964
COMM-FBI

Enclosures (5)
The Story of the FBI
Cooperation The Backbone of Effective Law Enforcement
Fingerprint Identification
The FBI Laboratory
Facts about a Career in the FBI

NOTE: Correspondent is not identifiable in Bufiles. See D. C. Morrell to Mr. DeLoach memorandum dated 5-8-64 captioned "'The Baffling Burning Death' by Allan W. Eckert, True Magazine, May, 1964."

FBI READING ROOM
MAY 8 4 29 PM '64
b6
b7C

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- DeLoach _____
- Evans _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Felt _____
- Tele. Room _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

MAY 23 1964
DGL:skf (3)
283 MAIL ROOM TELETYPE UNIT

TRUE COPY



5-5-64

Dear Sirs:

Our Science class at Southwest DeKalb High just read an interesting article in True Magazine. It was on spontaneous human combustion and bodies that were burned to ashes within seconds with no damage to clothing and etc. It mentions that the FBI is working on it. Our science teacher asked me to write and find out what I could. So could you please send me any free information on this subject and the development of it. Cases, etc.

I would appreciate it very much.

Thank you,



W
del

ack 5-8-64
DCL/kcf
morrell to DeKalb
5-8-64 DCL/kcf

REC-18
EX-117

95-41192-12

12 MAY 18 1964

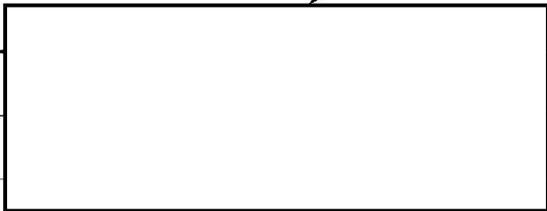
1-TC
5-7-64/dch

5-5-64

Dear Sirs:

Our Science class at Southwest DeKalb High School just read an interesting article in True Magazine. It was on spontaneous human combustion and bodies that were burned to ashes within seconds with no damage to clothing and etc. It mentions that the FBI is working on it. Our science teacher asked me to write and find out what I could. So could you please send me any free information on this subject and the development of it. Cases, etc. I would appreciate it very much.

Thank You,



ack 5-8-64
 JCL/kef.
 merrill to C. L. Cook
 5-7-64 JCL/kef

CORRESPONDENCE

1 TC
5-7-64 del

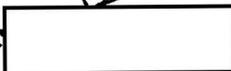
REC-40 95-41192-13

June 1, 1964



mt 9-

Dear



H.R.

MARY HAROLD REESER

Your letter of May 23rd requesting information concerning the case of Mrs. Mary H. Reeser has been received.

The FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in connection with Mrs. Reeser's death. This evidence was received from the Chief of Police in St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of the burning death of Mrs. Reeser. Examinations made by our Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated on a confidential basis, and I am not at liberty to make the results public.

Sincerely yours,

John Edgar Hoover
Director

- 1 - Ottawa - Enclosure
- 1 - Foreign Liaison Unit - Enclosure

Handwritten initials and signatures: JPH, DAV, [unclear]

NOTE: Bufiles contain no record of correspondent. In his incoming, [redacted] stated that after undergoing several days of mental tests, he was advised by a doctor that his "mental capacities must exceed those of the late Albert Einstein." In view of the fact that correspondent may suffer certain aberrations this letter is being sent on black letterhead. Background information concerning Mrs. Reeser's death is contained in D.C. Morrell to Mr. DeLoach memorandum dated 5/8/64, captioned "The Baffling Burning Death by Allan W. Eckert, True Magazine, May, 1964."

RECEIVED 20 JUN 1 1964

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- DeLoach _____
- Evans _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holmes _____
- Gandy _____

JUN 10 1964 RR:rcd (5)

MAIL ROOM TELETYPE UNIT

Handwritten initials: JPH, RR



May 23rd, 1964

J. Edgar Hoover - addressed.

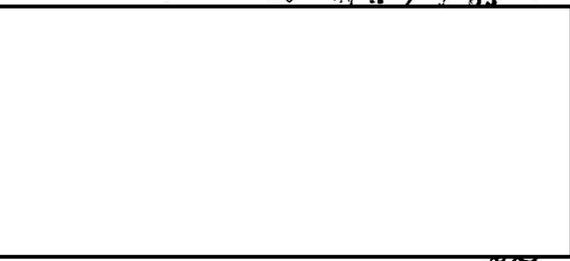
Dear Sir:

SP

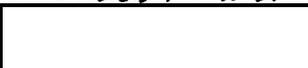
It has been reported that the F.B.I. investigated the baffling burning death of Mrs. Mary H. Pinner on or about July 2nd, 1951, at 1700 Cherry St., northeast, St. Petersburg, Florida.

While it would seem absurd to suggest that I might be able to contribute anything to a solution of this very mystifying kind of occurrence, it is a fact that, about 1 1/2 yrs ago I was told by a doctor, after I had undergone several days of mental tests, that my mental capacities must exceed those of the late Albert Einstein. That doctor's words could only have been a guess, as I was under sedation with "Largactil" at the time of the tests, which is a sort of "emergency brake" drug that slows down all the functions of the body, mind, memory - everything. The actual F.B.I. case, under that slowed down condition, was reported to me as 156-57792-13

Vertical stamp on the right margin: MAY 23 1964

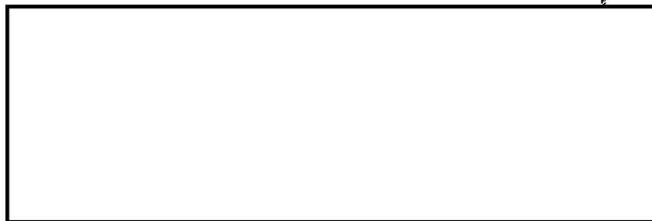


could it do any harm to supply me with full details on the above case? And on any similar cases known to you?
yours,
64 0526/1/64
DRice



R1

TRUE COPY



May 23, 1964

J. Edgar Hoover - addressed.

Dear Sir:

It has been reported that the F. B. I. investigated the baffling burning death of Mrs. Mary H. Reeser on or about July 2nd, 1951, at 1200 Cherry St., Northeast, St. Petersburg, Florida.

While it would seem absurd to suggest that I might be able to contribute anything to a solution of this very mystifying kind of occurrence, it is a fact that, about 7 1/2 yrs ago I was told by a doctor, after I had undergone several days of mental tests, that my mental capacities must exceed those of the late Albert Einstein. That doctor's words could only have been a guess, as I was under sedation with "Largactil" at the time of the tests, which is a sort of "emergency brake" drug that slows down all the functions of body, mind, memory - everything. The actual I. Q. score, under that slowed down condition, was reported to me as 156. Could it do any harm to supply me with full details on the above case? And on any similar cases known to you?

Yours,



*17c 5/28/64
see 5/1/64
me
RR/see*

- Mr. Tolson _____
- Mr. Belmont _____
- Mr. Mohr _____
- Mr. Casper _____
- Mr. Callahan _____
- Mr. Conrad _____
- Mr. DeLoach _____
- Mr. Evans _____
- Mr. Gale _____
- Mr. Rosen _____
- Mr. Sullivan _____
- Mr. Tavel _____
- Mr. Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Miss Holmes _____
- Miss Gandy _____

September 28, 1964

17 95-41192 - 14

SEP 28 3 44 PM '64
 REC'D-READING ROOM
 FBI

EX-102



Dear

Your letter of September 23rd, regarding the case of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser and other similar cases, has been received.

In response to your inquiry, the FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in the case of Mrs. Reeser received from the Chief of Police at St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of this matter. Examinations made by our Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated, however, on a confidential basis and I am not at liberty to make public the results of such examinations. I hope you understand my position.

Enclosed are booklets about the FBI which I hope you enjoy reading.

Sincerely yours,

J. Edgar Hoover

MAILED 6
 SEP 28 1964
 COMM-FBI

Enclosures (3)
 The Story of the FBI
 Fingerprint Identification
 The FBI Laboratory

DCL:pem/ (3)
 RECEIVED-DIRECTOR
 (See NOTE next page)

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- DeLoach _____
- Evans _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holmes _____
- Gandy _____

Leila

del
per
Daly
Asm/gan
...

OCT 5 1964

MAIL ROOM TELETYPE UNIT

b6
b7c



b6
b7c

NOTE: Correspondent is not identifiable in Bufiles. There have been numerous citizens' inquiries regarding the magazine article, "The Baffling Burning Death" which appeared in the May, 1964, "True Magazine." Allan W. Eckert states in this article that he talked to the FBI, knowing that we made Laboratory examination of the remains of Mrs. Reeser. He was advised of the confidential nature of our files and when Eckert asked for a copy of our report and the names of the persons who made our examinations, these requests were refused. He made a second inquiry for the names of our personnel involved in this case both in the field and in the Laboratory and was refused a second time. The cases described in this article involved deaths wherein humans suddenly burst into flames so intense their bodies are reduced to ashes within a few minutes, in most cases with little or no scorching of clothing or surroundings. Eckert refers to such deaths as being "spontaneous human combustion."

Replies to similar inquiries as correspondent makes have been answered above, and this acknowledgement is deemed appropriate for that reason in spite of correspondent's inquiry regarding Eckert. (94-3-4-166-230)

TRUE COPY

Sept. 10, 1964
Washington, La.

Dear Sir:

The tenth grade class of Port Barre High School read an article in a True magazine. (Edition of May 1964) This article was written by Allan W. Eckert. The name of the article was "The Baffling Burning Death." Mr Eckert said he talked to the F.B.I. about the mystery and others concerned. Our class would like to have more information on it. Since he talked to you, we thought you might know more about it.

Please send any information possible.

Sincerely Yours,

[Redacted Signature]

Address per envelope:

[Redacted Address]

Envelope postmarked September 23rd.

EX-102

REC-17

95-41192-14

10 SEP 29 1964

b6
b7c

Sept. 10, 1964
Washington, Pa.

Dear Sir:

The 10th grade class of Port
Barre High School read an article
in a True magazine. (Edition of May
1964) This article was written by
Allan W. Eckert. The name of the
article was "The Bayling Burning
Mutt". Mr Eckert said he talked
to the F. B. I. about the mystery and
others concerned. Our class would
like to have more information on
it. Since he talked to you, we
thought you might know more
about it.

Please send any information
possible.

Sincerely,
[Redacted]

b6
b7c

255 51



CORRECTION POINT

November 18, 1964

REC'D-READING ROOM
F B I
NOV 18 4 52 PM '64
5-9

ms
MCT-1 95-41192-15
REC-1
EX-101

[Redacted]

Dear [Redacted]

Your letter dated November 10th, requesting information concerning the case of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser or similar types of cases, has been received.

The FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in connection with Mrs. Reeser's death received from the Chief of Police in St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of this matter. Examinations made by our Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated, however, on a confidential basis, and I am not at liberty to make public the results of such examinations.

Sincerely yours,

~~L. Edgar Hoover~~

Mary Reeser

dcl

MAILED 6
NOV 18 1964
COMM-FBI

NOTE: Correspondent is not identifiable in Bufiles. An article entitled "The Baffling Burning Death" by Allan W. Eckert appeared in the May, 1964, issue of "True" magazine describing a case involving Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser in which her body seemed to disappear by spontaneous human combustion. The Bureau made Laboratory examination of evidence. The magazine story described other similar cases, and above reply has previously been given to related inquiries.

DCL:pem
(3)

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- DeLoach _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- Evans _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holmes _____
- Gandy _____

Accepted
Wells
Sam/Gene
etc

6 NOV 27 1964
MAIL ROOM TELETYPE UNIT

b6
b7c

[Redacted]

November 10, 1964

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington D.C.

Dear Sir:

We have seen in the May 1964 issue of True that the Federal Bureau of Investigation has looked into many cases of the Burning Death. Is this statement true? Would you please forward all information possible on the cases of the Burning Death? Thank you for your time.

Yours truly,

[Redacted]

J

[Redacted]

*ack 11-18-64
JCL: pem*

nm

REC-1

90-41192-15

EX-101

1 NOV 19 1964

CORRESPONDENCE

March 12, 1966

REC-99

95-41192-16

EX-103



b6
b7C

Dear

Your letter of March 7th, requesting information concerning the case of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser or similar types of cases, has been received.

The FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in connection with Mrs. Reeser's death received from the Chief of Police in St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of this matter. Examinations made by our Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated, however, on a confidential basis, and I am not at liberty to make public the results of such examinations.

Sincerely yours,

REC'D-READING ROOM
FBI
MAR 12 5 33 PM '66

- Mr. Tolson _____
- Mr. Belmont _____
- Mr. Mohr _____
- Mr. DeLoach _____
- Mr. Casper _____
- Mr. Callahan _____
- Mr. Conrad _____
- Mr. Felt _____
- Mr. Gale _____
- Mr. Rosen _____
- Mr. Sullivan _____
- Mr. Tavel _____
- Mr. Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Miss Holmes _____
- Miss Gandy _____

NOTE: An article entitled "The Baffling Burning Death" by Allan W. Eckert appeared in the May, 1964, issue of "True" magazine describing a case involving Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser in which her body seemed to disappear by spontaneous human combustion. The Bureau made Laboratory examination of evidence. The magazine story described other similar cases, and above reply has previously been given to related inquiries.

DCL:plr
(3)

[Handwritten signatures and initials]

Mail Room _____ Teletype Unit _____

TRUE COPY

March 7, 1965

Dear Sir:

I'm a student at De Mille Jr. High School, Long Beach Calif.

A subject came up in our class and I was wondering if you help us. This is in connection with our study of Chemistry.

We have heard of a certain condition where in the past a human body has been consumed by some very high temperture, and the surrounding area was not damaged. This particular case a woman sitting in a chair watching T. V. and all of a sudden she had burned up

If you could send me a report of this case or any other like this I would be very grateful

Thank you



W

b6
b7c

REC-99

95-41192-116

g del

SEARCHED

EX-103

*17C 3-11 ple
ack 3-12-65
DC: ple*

March 7, 1965

Dear Sir:

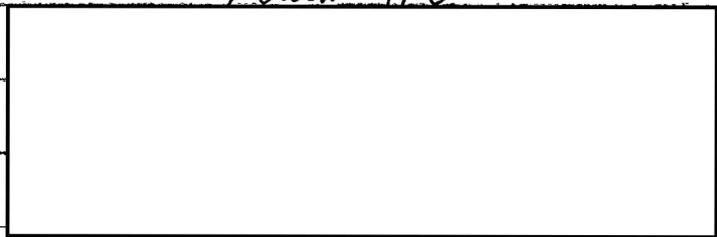
I'm a student of De Mille Jr. High School, Long Beach Calif.

A subject came up in our class and I was wondering if you help us. This is in connection with our study of Chemistry.

We have heard of a certain condition where in the past a human body has been consumed by the very high temperature, and the surrounding area was not damaged. This particular case a woman sitting in a chair watching T.V. and all of a sudden she had burned up.

If you could send me a report of case or any other like this I would be very grateful.

Thank you



b6
b7c

ITC 3-11 pl
Cub 3-12-65
DCC pl

CORRESPONDENCE

REC-49

November 16, 1965

95-41192-17



Dear [Redacted]

Your letter dated November 8th has been received.

Although I would like to be of service, we have no material to send you regarding spontaneous human combustion. For your information, the FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in connection with the death of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser, which has been said to have been caused by spontaneous human combustion, to assist the Chief of Police in St. Petersburg, Florida, in his investigation of this matter. Examinations made by our Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated on a confidential basis, however, and I am not at liberty to make public the results of such examinations.

MAILED 10
NOV 17 1965
COMM-FBI

Sincerely yours,
J. Edgar Hoover

John Edgar Hoover
Director

NOTE: An article entitled "The Baffling Burning Death" by Allan W. Eckert appeared in the May, 1964, issue of "True" magazine describing a case involving Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser in which her body seemed to disappear by spontaneous human combustion. The magazine article mentioned that the FBI examined evidence in Mrs. Reeser's case. Correspondent's teachers has no doubt read this magazine article, and replies along somewhat similar lines to above have previously been given in related inquiries.

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- DeLoach _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- Felt _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holmes _____
- Gandy _____

NOV 26 1965

MAIL ROOM TELETYPE UNIT

NOV 17 9 21 AM
FBI READING ROOM

b6
b7C

J. Edgar Hoover

help

✓

del

del

Ma *AM* *provision*

TRUE COPY

Nov. 8, 1965

Dear Sir:

I am very interested in spontaneous human combustion or SHC. We talked about it in my 8th grade Science class. I asked my Science teacher where I could obtain further information about SHC. He said probably the FBI. So could you please send me all of the information on SHC cases that you have. Thanks a million.

Sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

b6
b7C

My address is

[Redacted address]

Zip per postmark:

[Redacted zip code]

L

REC-49

95-41192-17

NOV 23 1965

Free

*ITC 11-15-65 dls
ack 11-16-65
DCL/dls 12*

Nov. 8, 1965

Dear sir:

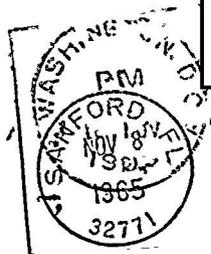
I am very interested in spontaneous human combustion SHC. We talked about it in my 8th grade Science class. I asked my Science teacher where I could obtain further information about SHC. He said probably the FBI. So could you please send me all of the information on SHC cases that you have. Thanks a million.

Sincerely,

[Redacted signature box]

My address is

[Redacted address box]



CORRESPONDENCE

b6
b7c

IPC 11-15-65
dls
ack 11-16-65
pct/dls/jg

November 3, 1965

95-41192-
[Redacted]

100-41192-16-265
b6
b7C
ORIGINAL FILED IN 94-3-4
FBI
RECORDS ROOM

Dear [Redacted]

Your letter dated October 30th, requesting information concerning the case of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser or similar types of cases, has been received.

The FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in connection with Mrs. Reeser's death received from the Chief of Police in St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of this matter. Examinations made by our Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated, however, on a confidential basis, and I am not at liberty to make public the results of such examinations.

Sincerely yours,

John Edgar Hoover
Director

NOTE: Correspondent is not identifiable in Bufiles.

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- DeLoach _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- Felt _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holmes _____
- Gandy _____

DCL:cvb
(3) cat

MAILED 30
NOV 3 1965
COMM-FBI

F-36
NOV 10 1965
MAIL ROOM TELETYPE UNIT

[Handwritten signatures and initials]
del RW
from request

[Redacted]

October 30, 1965

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Department of Justice
9th St. and Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C.

To Whom It May Concern:

Recently, I read an article in a past issue of TRUE Magazine (May, 1964) entitled "The Baffling Burning Death." This article mentioned that on July 2, 1951, Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser died in St. Petersburg, Florida, "from fire, with no idea of what caused it."

I have become very interested with this and would be very grateful for any information and facts that you could give me about this case, if it is at all possible.

I am a sophomore at Penn State University and I am working on a personal research project dealing with occurrences similar to that which happened to Mrs. Reeser.

May I say again that I would be thankful for any information that you could give me about this incident and any further developments. I can be reached at my mailing address:

[Redacted]

Sincerely yours,

[Redacted]

95-41192-
NOT RECORDED
176 NOV 5 1965

[Redacted]

NOV 4 1965

nml
ack 11-3-65
DCL: cub

94-3-4-166-264
ORIGINAL FILED IN

CONFIDENCE

June 8, 1965

95-41192-



Dear

Your letter of June 2nd, regarding the case of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser and other similar cases, has been received.

In response to your inquiry, the FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in the case of Mrs. Reeser received from the Chief of Police at St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of this matter. Examinations made by our Laboratory for law enforcement agencies are treated, however, on a confidential basis and I am not at liberty to make public the results of such examinations. I hope you understand my position.

Enclosed are booklets about the FBI which I hope you enjoy reading.

Sincerely yours,

J. Edgar Hoover

MAILED 27
JUN - 8 1965
COMM-FBI

Enclosures (3)
The Story of the FBI
Fingerprint Identification
The FBI Laboratory

NOTE: Correspondent is not identifiable in Bufiles. D. C. Morrell to Mr. DeLoach Memo dated 5-8-64 captioned " 'The Baffling Burning Death,' by Allan W. Eckert, 'True Magazine,' May, 1964, " points out that the Laboratory made examination of certain evidence in Mrs. Reeser's case, a death in which the body of the victim seemed to have been destroyed by fire within a matter of a short time. Above reply has been given to prior related inquiries.

WAM:mel (3) mel

MAIL ROOM TELETYPE UNIT

REC'D-READING ROOM
FBI

JUN 8 2 55 PM '65

ORIGINAL FILED IN 94-3-4-166-52
b6
b7c

Handwritten signatures: Keigel, Paul, Dan

- Tolson _____
- Belmont _____
- Mohr _____
- DeLoach _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- Felt _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Sullivan _____
- Tavel _____
- Trotter _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holmes _____
- Gandy _____

JUN 10 1965

Handwritten initials and signatures: am, spw, WAM

mg

June 2, 1965

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Constitution Avenue
Washington, D.C.

Dear sir:

I would like verification of the validity of an article in the May 1964 issue of True, the man's magazine. This is the article; "The Baffling Burning Death." It was stated that the F.B.I. did extensive work on one of these cases, this being the case of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser.

This material is needed for a Biology research paper. I would appreciate these verifying facts and any additional material which may be obtained on this subject.

Very truly yours, 95-41192

[Redacted signature]

P.S. My address is:

[Redacted address]

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ORIGINAL FILED IN 94-3-4-166-262

*ack 6-8-65
WAM:mul
nml*

95-41192-
NOT RECORDED
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~~JUN 9 1965~~

CORRESPONDENCE

JUN 10 1965

ST 101!

REC-6

95-41192 -18

1-Office, 7133
1-Mr. Gormley
January 26, 1971

Airmail



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b7c

Dear

Reference is made to your letter dated January 13, 1971, requesting information concerning the death of Mary Reeser.

In response to your inquiry regarding this case, we wish to advise that the FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence in connection with the death of Mary Reeser. That evidence was received from the Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Florida, who requested our assistance in his investigation of the death.

We are sure you will understand that examinations made by the FBI Laboratory are treated on a confidential basis, and that we are not at liberty to make public the results of such examinations. If you have not already done so, it is suggested that you may wish to communicate with the Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Florida, for the information which you requested.

The enclosure to your letter has been retained by us.

I trust that the above information will be helpful to you.

JAN 26 1971
COMM-FBI

Sincerely yours,

J. Edgar Hoover
John Edgar Hoover
Director

[Handwritten signatures and initials]

- Tolson _____
- Sullivan _____
- Mohr _____
- Bishop _____
- Brennan, C.D. _____
- Callahan _____
- Casper _____
- Conrad _____
- Felt _____
- Gale _____
- Rosen _____
- Tavel _____
- Walters _____
- Soyars _____
- Tele. Room _____
- Holmes _____
- Gandy _____

1 - Denver (with copy of incoming letter and its enclosure)

NOTE: Correspondent not identified in Bureau indices.

The death of Mary Reeser apparently by fire in her apartment, was later characterized in an exaggerated account (True Magazine, May, 1964) as the "Baffling Burning Death."

JLG:bp

57 FEB 1971 TELETYPE UNIT



13 January 1971

9-

ADD

Federal Bureau of Investigation
9th St. and Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D. C.

Gentlemen:

We are engaged in research on the rather mysterious phenomenon of ball lightning. Recently I received the enclosed letter concerning an unusual cremation case that occurred in Dublin, Eire.

I have read in a pulp paper magazine that a similar case occurred in the summer (June or July) of 1951 in St. Petersburg, Florida. An elderly woman named Mary Reeser was cremated under similar circumstances. It was also mentioned that your Bureau investigated this case. If your report is still available, we would greatly appreciate receiving a copy.

[Handwritten flourish]

Sincerely yours,



/rf
Encl.

** Not listed in Am. Mon. Sci. Author's Who
1/21/71*

REC-6

95-41192-18

JAN 27 1971

15T 101

ENCLOSURE

*ack
1/26*

*24/26
Contract*

95-41192



10th January 1971.



Gentlemen,

I have just seen your paper in Nature (228, 545, 1970) entitled "Is Ball Lightning a Nuclear Phenomenon?" I am an Irish Biochemist on leave of absence from [redacted] and at present in [redacted]. I have been interested in Ball Lightning for some years since reading of it in the literature and wish to relate an incident that occurred in Dublin, Ireland, last year, that might be of interest to you.

The following account is based on a Coroner's report of an inquest held into the death of a woman in her apartment in Dublin under mysterious circumstances.

A neighbour had left the woman who was somewhat elderly and infirm the afternoon preceding her death. On the following day the neighbour called back to the apartment and on receiving no reply assumed that something was amiss, and called the police.

On entering the apartment the police found no trace of the woman except for a charred pair of ankles remaining in a pair of shoes. The one striking feature of the scene of the accident was the restriction of the signs of intense heat to the place where the woman had been sitting. There was no charring of the carpet, curtains or paintwork on the walls of the room. The television set was some six feet away from the woman and its plastic screen was undamaged.

That the woman was exposed to some intense localised energy source was apparent by the fact that her body lipids had been vapourised and were spattered around the walls of the room. The Coroner returned a verdict that death was accidental and of unknown causes. The police technical experts and pathologists could not advance any cause of death. Lightning was ruled out as there was

95-41192-1.8

ENCLOSURE

continued.....

- 2 -

10th January 1971.

no thunder and lightning reported for the area by the Meteorological Office, and by the fact that the neighbours had not seen or heard any unusual noise in the locality on that day.

I wrote to the Coroner putting forward my theory that death was probably due to ball lightning, but he did not acknowledge my letter, assuming no doubt that I was some crank. I would be grateful to hear your comments on the incident.

Yours sincerely,



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b7c

EX-108

October 9, 1973

REC-58 95-41192-19



b6
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Dear

Your letter of September 21, 1973, addressed to Attorney General Richardson, has been referred to me.

Jaw

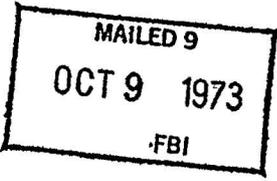
The FBI did not conduct any investigation concerning the death of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser; however, in line with long standing FBI policy of providing cooperative services to other law enforcement agencies, the FBI Laboratory examined certain evidence received from the Chief of Police in St. Petersburg, Florida, to assist him in his investigation of this matter. The evidence and results of the FBI examination were returned to the submitting agency.

Inasmuch as this matter was investigated by the St. Petersburg Police Department, and since they would be in possession of the original documents pertaining to the Reeser investigation, it is suggested that you contact that agency for any assistance it might be able to provide.

Sincerely yours,

C. M. Kelley

Clarence M. Kelley
Director



Blaw

RRF

Jaw

- 1 - The Deputy Attorney General - Enclosure
- 2 - Tampa - Enclosures (2)

Attention SAC: Enclosed herewith are copies of a request received from pertaining to death by fire of Mary Hardy Reeser in 1951. Bufile 95-41192 reveals that her death received wide publicity in St. Petersburg, Florida, in the early 1950s, due to the unusual nature thereof. Her file contains a copy of the results of FBI Lab examination and miscellaneous correspondence requesting information regarding her death. Tampa is requested to advise the Chief of Police, St. Petersburg, Florida, of correspondent's request and our reply. In addition, inform that the FBI has no objections to the release of results of FBI examination if this is consistent with the policy of Department.

*c.c. dest. C/mhwl 5/9/75
62/15538*

COPY DESIGNATIONS CONTINUED AND NOTE PAGE TWO

TELETYPE UNIT

JFK *MS/03*

[REDACTED]
1 - [REDACTED] (Attention: [REDACTED] - Enclosures (3)
1 - Bufile 62-115530 (FOI REPLIES)

NOTE: Bufiles contain neither information identifiable with correspondent nor any indication that the FBI directed the correspondent to write to the AG. Reply coordinated with Division 7. In addition, Mr. Malcolm D. Hawk, Special Assistant to the Attorney General, agreed that referral to the St. Petersburg PD would be an appropriate response to correspondent's request.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Memorandum

TO : Clarence M. Kelley
Director,
Federal Bureau of Investigation

DATE: SEP 26 1973

FROM : Malcolm D. Hawk
Special Assistant to the
Deputy Attorney General

MDA

SUBJECT: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUEST -

Enclosed herewith is a request for access to the FBI records regarding the unusual death of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser of St. Petersburg, Florida in July, 1951:

Pursuant to 28 CFR § 16.5 which took effect on March 1, 1973, the head of the responsible division shall, within 10 working days, either comply with or deny a request for records unless additional time is required.

In cases where additional time is required the requester should be notified of the reasons for the time extension, which should not exceed 10 additional working days. An extension of time in excess of 10 additional working days requires the approval of the Deputy Attorney General.

Copies of all acknowledgements and responses to the requester should be forwarded to the office of the Deputy Attorney General.

Ja

EX-104
SEP 27 1973
#31
10-11

Ja
ENCLOSURE
let to
AHM:law 10/3/73
cc: DAG 10/9/73
AHM:law

EX-104

REC-58

75-41192-19

OCT 11 1973

8-10-73

cc dest. Cymon 5/9/75
62-118800



b6
b7C

21 September 1973

Mr. Eliot Richardson,
The Attorney General,
10th & Constitution,
Washington, DC 20530

DEPT. OF JUSTICE
MAIL ROOM
ORON
SEP 25 1 53 PM '73

RECEIVED 3

Dear Sir:

I have been directed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to write to you for permission to look into their records regarding the unusual death of Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser of St. Petersburg, Florida in the early part of July, 1951. As the F.B.I. records are maintained as confidential records, I will give you the particulars in my request for your permission.

Some of my personal interests revolve about the unusual and bizarre phenomena encountered in science. Such topics as UFOs, teleportation, monsters, etc. are but a few that interest me. I have been actively involved with the Society for the Investigation of the Unexplained (S.I.T.U.) in Columbia, N.J. (a non-profit, tax exempt organization) and the International Fortean Organization (INFO) of Arlington, Va. which publish journals upon reports of such phenomena and their investigation. The death of Mrs. Reeser fits into such phenomena as it does not seem to be able to be explained in terms of modern science.

Much of the literature upon these phenomena are of a highly speculative, and frequently fictitious, nature. Various accounts of the same incident frequently differ in details and documentation is rare. Thus, when I care to look into such a case, I prefer to utilize the most thoroughly documented material available. The case of Mrs. Reeser is the only one which seems to have been investigated by professional, forensic scientists.

Recently, I conducted an investigation into the disappearance of six aircraft off Florida on December 5, 1945. I had read dozens of stories, alledgedly documented, of this incident; but all of them differed in relating the radio conversations held with the various aircraft before their disappearance. I went through the records of the investigation conducted by the U.S. Navy and reconstructed those conversations for the first time from the testimony given at the investigation and radio logs made by five stations. None of

1

95-41192-19

~~SEP 21 1973~~

ENCLOSURE

~~DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL~~

.../2

the earlier versions gave an accurate account of the radio conversations, and my later investigation discounts much of the speculative mystery of the incident and uncovered the true mystery that has yet to be answered. The results of my investigation may be published in a future issue of "Pursuit", the journal of S.I.T.U.

Mrs. Reeser is one of about fifty cases I have taken note of in what is termed "spontaneous human combustion". People seemingly burst into flame and are sometimes consumed until turned to a small mass of charred bone and ash. The nature of this combustion is most puzzling not only in its origin but in that objects nearby seem unaffected by what would have to be extreme temperatures involved. The details of this case also vary in the literature upon the subject; thus, the findings of the F.B.I. investigation into the matter, as called for by Police Chief J.R. Reichert of St. Petersburg, would be of enormous value.

There are three problems in this case that are of considerable importance: the greasy soot that filled the room when first entered, the alledged shrinkage of the skull, and the condition of the intact foot left unconsumed. The analysis of these items and their alledged occurrence pose the most important questions of whether Mrs. Reeser was consumed by a normal process of combustion or by some preter-natural process not yet understood.

If granted permission to inspect the F.B.I. records on this case, I would try to see which direction the evidence points towards and the actual details of the incident. I would like to have my findings published, and would be glad to oblige you with a copy of such an article before publication to assure you that no confidentiality is violated in regards to the legal standing of the case or the involvement of the F.B.I.

Your permission and advice on such an investigation by myself would be most welcome. I shall eagerly await your response.

Very truly yours,



SF:sf

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