

Gertrude MacDonald

(- 24 May 1911)

MacDonald. Suddenly on May 24, 1911, Gertrude Shaw MacDonald. Funeral Saturday, May 27 from Lee's Chapel, 332 Pennsylvania avenue northwest at 10 a.m. Friends and relatives respectfully invited.

The Evening Star, May 24, 1911, p. 1

Kills Young Wife In Office Building

E.J. MacDonald Fires Three Times at Woman, in Fifth Floor Corridor

Death Comes Hour Later in Hospital

Slayer Submits Quietly to Arrest Afte Committing Deed

Refuses To Talk of Case

Couple Were Separated Six Months Ago and Had Met Today by Special Appointment

Mrs. Gertrude MacDonald, twenty-four years old, of 928 I street northwest, was shot and fatally wounded by her husband, Edward J. MacDonald, at 1:30 o'clock this afternoon, in the fifth floor corridor of the Colorado building.

MacDonald pulled the trigger of the .38-caliber revolver four times, and three of the bullets penetrated his wife's body, one striking in the mouth, another in the left eye, and a third in the left shoulder. One shell in the revolver missed fire.

Mrs. MacDonald was carried in a dying condition to the Emergency Hospital, and her husband, who made no attempt to resist arrest, was taken to the first precinct police station.

Mrs. MacDonald was placed on the operating table immediately, but died in less than an hour.

Couple Had Been Separated

The couple were separated, and they met by appointment this morning in the office of an attorney on the fifth floor of the Colorado building. Certain moneys were coming to MacDonald, and it was necessary for his wife to sign the papers in order that he might get it.

Whether they were quarreling about this will be known only from the story MacDonald may tell later, but the first time the man and wife were noticed was when Miss M.H. Moore, a stenographer employed in the office of George W. Blankenship, was going toward the elevators to go out to lunch. She noticed the couple talking quietly, saw MacDonald take his wife by the arm. MacDonald's remark to his wife was inaudible, but Miss Moore heard Mrs. MacDonald say:

"Oh, I guess not," and with the remark Mrs. MacDonald laughed.

Woman's Sister Rushes Up

The elevator, with Miss Moore as a passenger, had just started downward when three shots rang out in quick succession.

Lemuel R. Fugitt, whose officers are on the fifth floor, rushed into the hallway and grabbed MacDonald by both arms. The man readily gave up the revolver, but just as he did so Mrs. MacDonald's sister, Mrs. Martha Bullock, who had been waiting on a lower floor, reached the scene. She accused MacDonald of the crime, and to her he replied:

"Yes, I have killed her, and you are the cause of all my troubles."

Other tenants in the building ran to the street and summoned Crossing Policeman Robert Kramer, to whom MacDonald surrendered. He was taken a prisoner to the first precinct station

Positively Refuses to Talk

Standing before the railing in the station house, MacDonald was obviously completely unnerved, and seemed only to stand by supporting himself against the woodwork. He developed a stubborn streak and, although papers were found in his pocket bearing the name of Edward J. MacDonald, he refused absolutely to admit that that was his name or to make a statement of any kind about the crime. He declined to give his age, but appeared to be about thirty-seven or thirty-eight years old.

Although it was possible to secure only fragmentary history of the couple this afternoon, it was said that they married about six years ago. At that time MacDonald, it is stated, told his wife he was from New York, but it seems she was never able to verify that statement.

Wife Went to New York

When the MacDonalds separated six months ago Mrs. MacDonald went to New York city. MacDonald had been writing to his wife, addressing her through Mrs. Bulloch, because he did not know her address there. In response to his entreaties she returned to this city three days ago, and their meeting at the Colorado building this afternoon was the outcome.

None of Mrs. MacDonald's relatives knew whether the young couple intended to see a lawyer this morning to arrange for a final separation or to effect a reconciliation. At any rate, it seems it was necessary for them to sign certain papers jointly, and this probably precipitated the trouble.

When MacDonald drew his revolver and fired his wife fell at the first shot, but he continued to point the revolver at her and to pull the trigger as fast she could, ceasing firing only when he believed he had killed his wife. The first spectators to reach the scene saw him standing, with the still smoking revolver in his hand, looking down at his victim.

Dr. Harry N. Kaufman happened to be in the building, and he gave first-aid treatment before the ambulance from the hospital arrived. To avoid the crowd the injured woman was carried to the rear of the building and lowered to the first floor on the freight elevator and placed in the ambulance.

Has No Regular Employment

As a result of their preliminary investigation in the case the police stated this afternoon that MacDonald has no regular employment, but that during the Christmas holidays he was a bar tender in McDonald's saloon, at 12th and B streets northwest. He is in no way related to the owner of the saloon. The police also stated that MacDonald was an ex-soldier and that he had served a term of one year in the soldiers' prison on Governors Island on a charge of desertion.

Although MacDonald has said nothing to the police in response to their many questions persons who witnessed his arrest say that he made this declamation:

"I got her and I guess I'll hang for it. That's to be seen."

The Evening Star, May 25, 1911, p. 1

Wife Slayer Held

Coroner's Jury Places Murder Charge Against MacDonald

Story of Tragedy Told

Witnesses Describe Scenes Before and After the Shooting

None Saw The Shots Fired

Prisoner, Nervous in His Cell, Says He Will Be Able to Justify Deed

Edward J. MacDonald, who shot and killed his wife, Gertrude MacDonald, yesterday afternoon in the corridor of the fifth floor of the Colorado building, is held for the action of the grand jury on the charge of murder, on the verdict of a coroner's jury, rendered today at the morgue.

The defenses will probably be insanity when the case comes to trial. While no evidence of the sort was presented to the coroner's jury, it is understood that an attempt to place MacDonald in a sanitarium under the charge of alienists was made several years ago.

Eight witnesses were heard by the jury. A number of them, businessmen, lawyer and a girl stenographer, testified to circumstances preceding and following the tragedy. There were no eye-witnesses except the principals. Mrs. Martha Billop, sister of the dead girl, repeated her story of how the couple came together by appointment.

Both the sister and Policeman Cramer told of charges made by the wife-slayer against the sister when she accused him of killing her sister. "It's your fault," declared MacDonald; and the policeman declares that he made an effort then to break away from him and attack Mrs. Billop. He says his prisoner lunged toward the woman several times, although he made no other resistance to arrest.

The policeman have testimony of bitter language used toward the sister, of which no other witness told on the stand. Mrs. Billop said she had no understanding of his accusation, especially as she had been the chief instrument, at his solicitation, to bring the couple together.

Lawyer Fugitt's Testimony

Lemuel Fugitt, a lawyer, with offices in room 505, on the fifth floor of the Colorado building, told of hearing the shots while in his office, of running into the corridor, of disarming the wife slayer and of holding him while the police came. The prisoner, he said, asked him not to hold him so tight, and said no other word, although his eyes filled with tears when the lawyer expressed pity for his deed.

Mr. Fugitt said that he detected the odor of intoxicants on the breath of MacDonald, and considered that his bearing was indicative of drunkenness.

Other witnesses testified that MacDonald bore himself as if in a stupor, and declared that he kept his eyes fixed on vacancy, during the time he was held awaiting the arrival of the police.

Margaret Moore, stenographer, on her way from the office of Mr. Blankinship, in room 527, on the fifth floor of the Colorado building, observed the couple in the corridor, and her interest was excited by the manner of the woman. She was not around when the shots were fired.

Heard Victim Laughing

She said that Mrs. MacDonald threw back her head and laughed scornfully at some remark of her husband, who then seized her arm angrily. Mrs. MacDonald stepped back, said the witness. As Miss Moore entered the elevator to descend, she heard the woman say, "Well, I guess not," and laugh long and gayly.

Walter Price, M.D., resident physician at Emergency Hospital, told of being called to the side of the dying woman, of carrying her to the hospital in the ambulance, and of the wounds discovered and the hopelessness of surgery to save her life, and of her death within twenty-five minutes after reaching the hospital. Charles S. White, deputy coroner, recited the results of the autopsy, and ascribed death to a bullet that had penetrated the brain. There were two other wounds, one through the eye and another in the shoulder.

A.H. Weber and Gordon R. Cowrie, who have offices in the Colorado building, added details of what happened after the shots were fired, when they rushed from their offices to find a tragedy committed.

The witnesses were not questioned by the attorneys for the accused man, Robert L. Montague and Herbert Robinson.

Prisoner Spends Restless Night

MacDonald spent a restless night in a cell at the first precinct police station. He paced the cell floor most of the night, stopping occasionally to rest a few minutes on the iron bench.

Seated in front of his cell during the entire time he was its sole occupant was a policeman in uniform. His presence there was much on the order of the death watch placed over condemned men in jail. The policeman was kept there, it is said, for fear MacDonald would make an attempt to end his life.

This morning the prisoner appeared repentant, although he expressed by word no remorse for his act of yesterday. He had fully recovered from the effects of the strong drink in which he had indulged, however. He would make no statement in addition to what he had told Detective Evans and Precinct Detective Messer at the first precinct station yesterday afternoon.

When taken to police headquarters this morning to be measured and photographed he found himself in a room with other offenders. He displayed considerable interest in the work of the Bertillion operator and photographer.

"I have nothing to say," he replied to Inspector Boardman when asked if he desired to make a statement.

After being measured and photographed MacDonald was returned to the first precinct station and held until he was taken to the morgue to be present at the inquest.

From the prisoner relatives of his wife and other sources the police learned something of MacDonald's past. He is a native of New York, they learned, and his father is manager of a hotel at Rennselaer, N.Y. His brothers, George MacDonald, jr.; Walter and William MacDonald, are said to be in the hotel business in New York state.

Had Served in the Army

MacDonald enlisted in the Hospital Corps of the United States Army and served on Governors Island, N.Y, afterward coming to this city and serving at the Washington barracks. Detective Messer served with him as a member of the Hospital Corps. Messer recognized MacDonald when he saw him at the police station yesterday.

Nearly six years ago MacDonald was discharged from the service at Fort Myer, Va. It was about that time he met Miss Gertrude Shaw. Their marriage took place shortly afterward.

Rumor had it yesterday that Mrs. MacDonald had refused to go to Sag Harbor, N.Y, with her husband, and that that refusal brought about the fatality. The statement of the prisoner does not connect such an incident with the shooting.

"I was on the job," he stated to Detective Charles A. Evans and Precinct Detective Messer, leading them to believe that he had found his wife in the Colorado building under conditions which he did not approve.

"But" said Detective Evans, "a subsequent explanation of her presence there makes it appear that he lured her there for the purpose of killing her. Why he should have taken such public place I cannot understand."

It developed that MacDonald induced his wife to meet him in the building by telling her he had to get her signature for \$20 he said he was to receive from his mother's estate, one-half of which, he had told her, he was going to give her. Such information, it is stated, was also conveyed to the woman before she returned here from New York, the correspondence between husband and wife having been carried on through a sister.

Not Known to Lawyer

Mention was made by MacDonald of the law firm of McNeill & McNeill, ninth floor of the Colorado building. At the office of the firm it was said nothing was known of MacDonald. The police are satisfied that the prisoner invented the story solely for the purpose of getting his wife where he could kill her.

The police are unable to understand why MacDonald should have inveigled her into meeting him at the Colorado building, and why it was deemed necessary for Mrs. M.A. Billop, her sister, to accompany her.

Since her return from New York four days ago, after a separation of several months, husband and wife were in the Billop home at 928 I street. Tuesday night they were in a summer garden together. Yesterday they were at the I street house, not much more than thirty minutes before the shooting occurred.

Mrs. MacDonald and Mrs. Billop went from the home to the Colorado building together. Mrs. MacDonald had made an engagement to meet her husband at the building at 1:30 o'clock.

"I used to be afraid of Ed," Mrs. MacDonald said to her sister, while on the way to the building. "I don't feel the least bit afraid of him today."

MacDonald was waiting on the first floor of the building when his wife and sister-in-law reached there. Husband and wife entered the elevator. As it started to ascend, Mrs. MacDonald waived to her sister and smiled. It was but a few minutes before the fatal shot was fired.

The remark of Mrs. MacDonald: "Oh, I guess not." made just before the shots were fired, it is thought, indicated that the husband threatened to kill his wife, and she tried to show she did not fear him.

When MacDonald made the statement: "I was on the job," he was asked for an explanation. "Why did you do it?" Detective Evans asked him.

Claims He Was Justified

"I won't make a statement today," was his response. "When I do -- I was justified in what I did, and I'll show up some people here.

"No one knows what I have gone through with her during the past five years," added MacDonald. "My life was ruined five years ago when I married her."

"Was your wife in the building to meet anybody?" the prisoner was asked.

"Never mind now," he replied. "I was right on the job."

MacDonald made no direct admission that he had fired the three shots. He told other things, however, to make it certain that there was no doubt as to who fired them.

The prisoner admitted ownership of the revolver, saying he purchased it in Baltimore about two years ago. He said he had had it in pawn since then, having redeemed it recently.

When MacDonald and Precinct Detective Messer met and recalled having served together, the man behind the bars said: "I've got myself in a whole lot of trouble," adding that he was justified in doing what he did.

Assistant United States Charles H. Turner visited the first precinct police station yesterday afternoon and discussed the shooting with the police. He directed the detectives to advise MacDonald that what he said would be used against him. The detectives so advised him, and he said he fully understood his rights.

During the time MacDonald has resided in this city he has had employment in the office of the Blue Line Transfer Company, in the Potomac yards of the Southern Railway Company, and as bartender in saloons. His last saloon employment was at Martin McDonald's, 12th and D streets northwest, where he worked during the Christmas holidays.

The prisoner's only callers at the police station last night, it is stated, were a saloonkeeper and bartender.

The Evening Star, May 27, 1911, p. 5

Mrs. MacDonald Buried

Interment in Cemetery In Sight of Where Husband Is Confined

Edward J. MacDonald, charged with the murder of Gertrude Shaw MacDonald, his wife, sat in a cell in the District jail this morning while the body of his wife, in a flower-covered casket, was taken to

Congressional Cemetery and interred. In order to reach the cemetery it was necessary for the funeral procession to pass within sight of the prison.

Rev. D. Hez Swem officiated at the funeral services, held in the chapel at Lee's undertaking establishment, 332 Pennsylvania avenue northwest at 10 o'clock. Mr. and Mrs. Mark Shaw, parents of the deceased and other relatives were in attendance. Numerous floral tributes were banked about the casket.