

## Lee On

( - 12 Feb 1912)

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*The Evening Star, February 14, 1912, p. 1*

### **Police Given Clue**

### **Suspect Negro Named "Curley" in Murder of Chinaman Seen To Enter Laundry**

### **Colored Woman Says He Was Accompanied by Another Struck Heavy Blow On Head**

### **Slayer Left Practically No Clue in Little Shop -- Robbery the Motive**

"Curley," a colored man, supposed to hang about Cheater court, is wanted by the police to account for his whereabouts and actions, and his association with another negro, before and after 10 o'clock last night about the time that a Chinese laundryman, Sam Hing, was struck down and killed while at work in his little laundry shop at 3430 14th street.

A negro woman domestic, Mattie Gray, gives the only tangible clue in the mystery to the police, telling of having seen the man she knows as "Curley," accompanied by another negro, known to her by sight, but not by name, enter the laundry at about 10 o'clock. She declares that as she passed the men on the street in the vicinity of the laundry she overheard them talk of "getting him now."

Curley, she says, carried a slender package in his hand, about fifteen inches long and wrapped in paper. This he was swinging by one end, she says.

According to Mattie Gray, who went to the laundry at 10 o'clock this morning to tell her story, she had been sent out last night by the woman who employs her to deliver a message on 14th street in a house nearly directly opposite the laundry, and was accompanied on the mission by a negro girl employed in the house next to where she herself worked.

### *Domestics Watched Negroes*

Reaching the corner of 14th street, the two domestics passed the two negro men, and became interested in their movements overheating their threat to "get" somebody. Not knowing who was meant, the women lingered, expecting possibly to see a fight. When their interest was apparent, the men turned down a side street, and the girls went on to their destination.

While the women were waiting on the stoop of the house on 14th street, after having rung the bell, the two men reappeared from around the corner, and walked toward the laundry. The women saw the Chinaman within, working over his ironing board, talking to another Chinaman, who went away just as the two negroes entered.

The women not able to arouse any person in the 14th street household then went on their way, not suspecting that the Chinaman was the man the negroes were after. Mattie Gray described Curley as dark brown of skin, with curling -- not woolly -- brown hair. His companion, she says, was almost white.

Save for descriptions of negroes seen in the vicinity of the laundry at various hours of the evening yesterday, there is no other clue in the possession of the police to point the finger of suspicion in any direction in the search for the murderer of the Chinaman.

There are finger prints in blood, but they are apparently those of the oriental, made while on his feet fighting off death. There are two footprints in the snow, probably made by the slayer in making his escape, but they are so indefinite in form that their use as identifying marks seems impracticable. There is nothing else.

There is nothing to indicate that the Chinaman made a struggle against his murderers; probably the first blow, crushing his skull, rendered him unconscious.

### *Robbery Believed to Be Motive*

Robbery is the real or apparent motive of the crime. The cash drawer was rifled; yet its contents must have been meager to attract the cupidity of a desperate character, ready to kill to obtain money. Sam Hing made only from \$5 to \$6 a week, according to Chinamen who know him and his affairs, yet he may have carried about him a greater sum.

A tong man, Sam Hing, was a member of the Chinese Empire Association. There has not been a tong war in Washington for a generation. There is no evidence of any undercurrent of animosity among the vacations. In fact, the political struggle in China appears to have amalgamated nearly all sons of the Flowery Kingdom under the republican banner of Sun Yat Sen.

Sam Hing is a Chinaman who has been long in America, dwelling sometimes in San Francisco, afterward in New York and for many years in Washington, conducting his little shop on 14th street with habits of eternal industry that brought slender profit, and had no known enemy personal or political.

Pounding weakly on a partition wall that divides his quarters into rooms, crying feebly for help with the blood streaming down over his face and into his eyes, he was found by a policeman at about 10:20 o'clock last night. Hurried to the hospital, there the Chinaman died at midnight, without giving any account of the tragedy which had cost him his life.

### *Many Weapons About*

Washroom, bedroom and the storeroom and shop, where customers are received, all have the appearance of a shambles. Over floor and walls and furniture and linen, hung to dry on lines of twine, the red blood is everywhere -- pools of it, on the floor, spattered about everywhere else.

There are many sorts of heavy metal pieces about, any one of which might have been used to inflict the wounds found on his skull. There are flat irons, a heavy fire poker and iron rod used to stir laundry in the clothes boiler, a hatchet for cutting boxes into kindling wood for the laundry range; none bear the slightest evidence of having been the fatal weapon -- on none is there a blood mark or stain.

Sam Hing, with tired eyes -- he was fifty-seven or more years old, with the age of the unvarying grind of eternal labor, and his eyesight was known to have been of the worst -- was working over his ironing board, with a man's shirt under his smoothing iron, when fate overtook him. The cuff of the shirt half polished, is on the ironing board where he would have been working, and the iron is on the stand where it would have been laid out of his hand for the morning.

Whoever struck him down struck the blow at that very place, where the Chinaman had suspended his work without moving his feet to peer up at the newcomer into the shop. A great pool of blood on the floor in front of the ironing board shows where Sam Hing dropped in his tracks.

An autopsy at the morgue this morning showed that his forehead was fractured by the only blow struck. A blow in the right side fractured three ribs, one of them broken in many places.

From this spot into the middle room, where the Chinaman had his sleeping bunk on a board against the wall, his body was apparently dragged out of the sight of any one on the street. Inert and unconscious, his clothing was searched and the cash drawer opened and its contents taken by the slayer.

### *Slayer Left by Back Door*

Locking the front door, throwing the key under the bench in the front room, the slayer made his way out of the back. There is no knob on the inside of the rear door, nor is there any mark to show that the murderer had soiled his hands, which would have been made evident by the difficulty of fumbling with the stem of the knob to open the door.

The door opens upon an alley about two and a half feet wide littered with many impediments that make it impassable. A high fence is on the other side of the alley. Over this the slayer made his way,

leaving no hand mark on the wooden boards which he must have clutched, but making the indistinct marks of his shoes in the heavy crusted snow on the other side as he jumped to the ground

The Chinaman, recovering semi-consciousness in a few minutes, must have struggled to his feet, half-blinded, weak, aimlessly trying to find a way to the door, calling and pounding on the partitions. Everywhere is the evidence of his floundering about; there is blood on everything in three rooms.

By the vender of fruit next door -- who thought a drunken man was in the place and that it was none of his affair -- and by dwellers in the house to the rear of the laundry shop the cries and poundings were heard. The child in the house in the rear called the attention of their father to the noises and he went forth and notified a policeman.

Policeman W.C. Allen was the man he told. Allen went immediately to the spot. Finding the front way closed, he entered by the rear, climbing over barrels and boxes in the alley till he reached the rear door, which was unlocked.

He found the Chinaman in this rear room, sustaining himself on his feet by holding on to the side of the partition wall and to a box. With body bowed, knees bent and half collapsing over another box, the dying Chinaman was still making ineffectual efforts at times to pound on the wooden wall, but his cries had subsided into moans.

#### *Gave No Account of Assault*

The Chinaman could give no account of what had happened to him. He sank almost immediately into unconsciousness. Policeman Allen summoned aid and the precinct patrol wagon. The oriental, on a liter, was carried out by the rear, down the alley, put into the patrol wagon and hurried to Garfield Hospital. There he died at about midnight, without recovering consciousness carrying with him his knowledge of how he met his death.

Annie Dade, colored, employed by the Chinaman to wash for him, left the shop at 8:20 o'clock last night. She appeared this morning to resume work at about 8 o'clock. She knew of no one who could have had enmity against the Chinaman.

On the hook, where the laundryman kept the laundry tickets returned by customers when they come for their wash she found several tickets that had not been there at the hour when she left the shop last night. As these tickets may represent wash called for by the slayer of the murdered man the police hope to find in them a possible clue.

Clarence F. Cobb, a resident of the vicinity, told the police that he has long taken a personal interest in the Chinaman, and he offered \$100 reward for the capture of the murderer. He says that Sam Hing, in addition to his daily receipts of cash, kept in the cash drawer also carried about his clothing a big roll of bills.

Mr. Cobb recently gave to the Chinaman a money bag, in which he put these bills. What has become of this supposed roll of money is not now known to the police. They suspect that the murderer found it in searching the dying man's clothing.

Sam Hing is supposed to have three cousins living in Washington. A Chinaman gives their names as Lee Chom, Lee Mane and Lee Wan, all dwelling at 342 Pennsylvania avenue.

*The Evening Star, February 8, 1913, p. 1*

**Says He Is Slayer**

**Theodore Norris, Colored, Confesses Murder of Lee Ong**

**Is Faced By Companion**

**Nathan Johnson Declares He Witnessed Killing of Chinaman**

**Both Are Held For Crime**

**Remark of Wife of Man Who Struck Fatal Blow Leads to Solving of Mystery**

Theodore Norris, colored, twenty-eight years old, who lives at 2120 Pennsylvania avenue northwest, is alleged to have confessed to the police this afternoon that he killed Lee Ong, a Chinese laundryman, nearly a year ago. The confession of Norris followed a statement made to the police by Nathan Johnson, also colored, that he witnessed the killing of the Chinaman, and that the murder was committed by Norris, Johnson, who formerly lived at Sugarland, Md., now lives at 466 Washington street northwest. Norris, his wife, Hattie Norris, and Johnson were all arrested last night.

Lee Ong, the murdered Chinaman, was proprietor of a laundry at 3430 14th street northwest. On the night of February 13, 1912, he was killed in the rear room of his laundry, and the police failed to discover any clues leading to the detection of the murderer.

#### *Johnson Tells All*

Detective Stringfellow of the third precinct arrested Johnson yesterday, and after being questioned by the police Johnson, it is said, finally admitted that he knew the man who killed Lee Ong. A few minutes later he told the police the slayer's name, and Norris was arrested shortly afterward.

Norris vigorously denied any knowledge of the crime, but on repeated questioning finally broke down and told the police, so they say, that he was the Chinaman's murderer.

Detective Stringfellow obtained information leading to the detection of the alleged slayer when he arrested a young colored man three days ago. The prisoner, it is stated, in order to get in the good graces of the detective, told a story of a remark he said he heard Hattie Norris make to her husband. Norris and his wife were quarreling, he stated, and he said he heard the woman say to Norris: "If you strike me again I'll tell what you and Nathan Johnson did to the Chinaman."

Feeling satisfied the information thus obtained would lead to something of interest in the case of Lee Ong's murder. Detective Stringfellow set about to accomplish the arrest of Norris and Johnson.

#### *Bolts Through Window*

Norris, it is said, had an idea the police wanted him in connection with the theft of a bicycle, and he bolted through a back window in an effort to get away. Outside the house he was caught, however, and although the police had discussed the murder of the Chinaman with him several times he steadfastly maintained his innocence until he faced Johnson this afternoon.

Mrs. Norris was not inclined to discuss her domestic troubles or to say anything about the killing of the Chinaman further than to declare she knew nothing of it.

Not only did Johnson tell of the details of the murder, but he told of Norris having dropped a sweater in the laundry.

#### *Soon Loses His Nerve*

When the prisoners were brought face to face a police headquarters this afternoon. Norris soon lost his nerve and said he would "come across." He told substantially the same story as that told by Johnson, with the exception that he said Johnson dealt the Chinaman several blows.

Johnson declared that he had not the slightest idea where Norris was going to take him the night of the murder until they actually reached the laundry. They walked all the way from Washington street to Lee Ong's place of business, he stated, and he told of how they had looked through the window as was related by a resident of 14th street at the time the murder and robbery was committed.

Norris, the police say, said Johnson, had the gray sweater in a piece of paper, and when they reached the vicinity of the laundry he said he was going to leave the sweater there to have it washed. Entering the laundry, he said, Norris asked the Chinaman what he would charge to wash the garment, and he replied: "Ten cents."

### *Hit on Head With Club*

Just as the Chinaman reached for the sweater, Johnson said. Norris struck him on the head with a club.

"I don't know where he got the club," he stated. "He may have had it when he came for me, but if he did I didn't see it."

As soon as Lee Ong fell to the floor, declared Johnson. Norris locked the door, dragged him to the rear room and robbed the till. He struck the Chinaman several blows while the latter was on the floor.

Johnson said he finally went to the back room and left the premises by way of the back door. He and Norris climbed the back fence and left that vicinity, going in the direction of 16th street. Norris, he stated, gave him \$2.50, but did not say what amount of money he took from the cash drawer.

"I have seen Norris only once since the Chinaman was killed," Johnson told Detectives Cornwell and Stringfellow today, "and we did not discuss the killing."

Norris told the detectives that he got about \$5 from the cash drawer. He said he killed the Chinaman with a billiard cue and not with the piece of iron that was found in the laundry and which it was thought was the weapon.

"I got the cue in a billiard room on 26th street," Norris stated, "and after leaving the laundry I took it home and burned it."

Following the confession of Norris and his statement implicating Johnson, the police charged both prisoners with murder, and held Mrs. Norris at the house of detention as a witness.

*The Evening Star, February 17, 1912, p. 2*

### **Police Still in Dark**

#### **No New Developments Today in Murder of Lee On**

There were no developments today in the police investigation of the death of Lee On, who was murdered last Tuesday night in his laundry, 3430 14th street n.w.

The police worked on a clue last night which it was believed would develop into the arrest of the person or persons responsible for the death of the Chinaman, but they said today the information proved valueless.

*The Evening Star, May 28, 1913, p. 5*

### **Admit Killing Lee On**

#### **Long-Sought Murderers of Chinese Laundryman Are Remanded For Sentence**

Nathan Johnson and Theodore Norris, colored, pleaded guilty today to murder in the second degree, when called for trial before Justice Stafford in Criminal Court No. 1 to answer an indictment for first degree murder in connection with the killing of Lee On, a Chinese laundryman, at 3430 14th street northwest, February 13, 1912. The prisoners were remanded for sentence.

For nearly a year the police were at a loss to discover the perpetrators of the crime, and it was not until February 6 last that an authentic clue was discovered.

Norris had a quarrel with his wife, and his brother-in-law, Thomas Ware, overheard the wife tell Norris that if he hit her again she would tell the police that he and "Nath" Johnson killed the Chinaman.

Ware was arrested about this time by Detectives Stringfellow and Cornwell and during a conversation referred to the statement made by his sister, the detectives say.

Investigation led to the arrest of Norris and Johnson and it is claimed they admitted to the police that they had robbed and beaten the Chinaman.

Attorneys A.W. Scott and George F. Collins represented the defendants. Assistant United States Attorney Proctor was prepared to conduct the prosecution.