

The sad demise of Mrs. Wing

by Patricia Winans

It was business as usual at Rosie Wing's house the day that she was murdered. Her place was a popular stop for anyone needing company, a loan or a bottle of spirits; Rosie's neighbours reported that on October 2, 1951 they saw nothing out of the ordinary regarding her visitors.

Rosie Wing lived in Moncton at 103 Robinson Street below the railway tracks. The front part of the house was charred and burned-out from a fire. Rosie lived in one room that was still intact at the back of the building and a small gas stove was all that she had to keep her warm. On particularly cold days she visited a neighbour across the street to escape the draught and chill, remaining ever vigilant and returning home when she saw someone approaching her house.

Finding Rosie's house was easy. She scrawled the street number in chalk on one of the boarded-up front windows and a roughly printed sign directed visitors to "Come Bak Door". The small room where she lived was piled high with boxes, tin cans, clothes, papers, shoes and other debris that covered the furniture. A single light bulb hung from the ceiling and some light came in from the partially covered window. The small cot where she slept was barely visible. It was difficult to enter and to move about the room because of the clutter. The door was obstructed and wouldn't open beyond a couple of feet.

At 1:22 a.m. on the morning of October 3, 1951 the police received a call from a woman at 180 High Street inquiring if "anything had happened to Rosie Wing". The caller asked the police to come to her home right away because she needed to talk to them. In the meantime, others checked on Rosie and found her sprawled dead on the floor in the back doorway of her home. She had multiple injuries about her face and head. A broken jar of pickles



Police came across this photo, presumably of Mrs. Wing, at the house where her bloody and beaten body was found. The photo was published in newspapers across Canada, in an effort to locate her next of kin. Those notices listed her maiden name as "Balatem". Her marriage certificate lists it as "Balaske." When no heirs came forward, her consider estate became the property of the New Brunswick government

lay beside her on the floor.

Within thirty minutes of finding Rosie's body, Donald Capson was picked up by the police on St. George Street. The woman who called the police and inquired about Rosie Wing was Donald Capson's mother-in-law, Mrs. Maude LeBlanc. At first, Capson was held on charges of being intoxicated but by that afternoon he was formally charged with Rosie Wing's murder. Another man, Stanley Alvin Smith, Capson's brother-in-law, was taken into custody as a material witness to the crime.

Rosie Balaske was born in Poland in 1896 and immigrated to Montreal when she was three years old. It was in Montreal that she met and married Charles Wing who already owned the Paris Cafe on Moncton's Main Street. Charles was a native of Canton, China and described by those who knew him as a "dapper young man" with a university education.

The Wings were an attractive couple. At their restaurant, Charles attended to their customers while Rosie provided supper entertainment on the player piano. Charles also owned a Chinese dry goods and grocery business on Robinson Street which he developed as a supply source for other Chinese restaurants and businesses in the area.

During the early 1930's business at the Paris Cafe began to fail. Charles Wing was in poor health and became despondent as he watched his debts pile up. On June 10th, 1932 he told Rosie that he was going to Sackville on business and not to expect him back before Monday. He then checked himself into the Brunswick Hotel. Monday morning the hotel staff found him dead in bed.

The letter Charles Wing left for his wife Rosie told her that he intended to commit suicide and explained what he wanted her to do with the businesses. He also left a note for his creditors apologizing for not being able to pay his

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debts because “I am too sick for too long and business too poor, can’t pay what I owe and wife works too hard”.

Two empty bottles were found in the hotel room. One bottle smelled strongly of whiskey, the other was assumed to be some sort of poison. Due to the cost, no tests were done to attempt to determine if Charles Wing died of poisoning. The jury for the coroner’s inquest concluded, “the evidence seemed to point to self destruction and did not warrant a large expenditure”.

Left alone, Rosie went into business on her own. The Great Depression was a trying time and Rosie creatively and quietly offered her services as a private money lender. After she died, a stash of watches, pieces of gold and diamond jewellery and other small valuables were found in her home — possibly taken in as collateral for loans. She was also known to sell a bottle of liquor or wine if the opportunity arose and kept a well stocked cupboard for her customers. At the time of her death she owned four properties in Moncton and while searching her house the police found about \$24,000 in cash and bonds. The money was folded, wrapped in paper and tucked in tin cans and bottles which were scattered amongst the debris in her room. One large bundle of money was found in a stove pipe hole in the charred ruins at the front of her house.

In addition to investigating Rosie Wing’s murder, the police needed to inform her relatives of her death. Neighbours thought that she had a sister and nieces and nephews in Montreal. An intensive search and publication of her photo in various Canadian newspapers, however, did not result in any heirs coming forward. The question then was what to do with her properties and the money, bonds and valuables that had been found in her house. At first, Detective F.P. Shea of the Moncton Police Force was appointed caretaker of the estate. Later, in Probate Court, the province of New Brunswick public administrator was appointed in charge. No relatives or heirs were found and Rosie’s assets became the property of the Province of New Brunswick. After the police investigation was complete, the house at 103 Robinson was demolished. At her funeral, members of the Moncton Police Force served as her pall-

bearers and she was later buried in Elmwood Cemetery.

Like many in Moncton, Donald Capson knew Rosie Wing. His brother-in-law Stanley Smith lived down the street from Rosie, and Capson and Smith had recently papered some rooms in one of Rosie’s houses. Capson was a returned soldier and had served in the Royal Canadian Engineers before settling into civilian life as a house painter. The day that Rosie was murdered, Capson and Smith spent the day together. It was raining and because they were unable to work outside painting, they passed the time talking, and sharing a quantity of wine.

Donald Capson needed money. He was facing a charge of ‘making false pretences’ because he was accused of altering the amount on a cheque that someone had given him. Soon due to appear in court, Capson told his friends that he was worried because he didn’t have any money to pay a lawyer and he needed at least \$100 that day by midnight . He

had already tried to borrow the money from a finance company but they had turned him down. In the early evening of October 2, 1951 Donald Capson was seen coming down Robinson Street with Stanley Smith and then Capson alone went up the alley to Rosie’s back door and “just walked in”.

Shortly after Capson entered Rosie Wing’s back door, four young boys who were playing in the street heard screams coming from the house. They ran and told one of the workers at Lockhart’s Mill what they had heard and then told another man who just happened to be walking by. Neither of the men paid attention to the story.

About two hours later Donald Capson arrived at Stan Smith’s house. Capson was quoted as saying, “... Rosie Wing is as dead as a nit”. Capson’s pants and shirt were wet and soiled. He asked Smith for a change of clothes and then Smith helped Capson burn the old clothes in the stove. After sharing more wine, Capson asked Smith for a pair of gloves because he was “going to... Rosie’s place”. Smith told him to go home.

Nearing midnight, Capson went home to his apartment at 180 Dominion Street. His mother-in-law became



Within hours of the discovery or Rosie Wing’s body, Donald Capson was taken into custody as a suspect.

suspicious because he wasn't wearing his own clothes. Capson explained that he had "gotten them dirty." Shortly after arriving he changed his shoes and left again telling his wife and mother-in-law, "I'm going to Rosie's ... but I'll be back".

The two women noted what appeared to be blood on the shoes that Donald Capson left behind. Fearing for Rosie Wing's safety, Mrs. LeBlanc called the police and Capson was picked up walking along St. George Street.

After an inquest into the circumstances of Rosie Wing's death and a preliminary hearing, enough evidence was presented to commit Donald Capson for trial on the charge of murdering Rosie Wing. The trial began on February 26, 1952 in the Dorchester Court House and went on for eight days. A severe blizzard interrupted the proceedings for two days. This left the judge, lawyers, witnesses and the many curious on-lookers storm stayed and having to find accommodation as best they could. Many witnesses were called to testify. Evidence such as palm prints found at the murder scene that matched those of Capson, blood stains on his shoes and one of Rosie Wing's blood smeared hairs on his jacket all pointed to Capson's guilt.

Donald Capson took the stand in his own defence. He admitted that he was at the scene of the crime. However, he insisted that he didn't remember anything between his being out on the railway tracks with Stan Smith and then waking up in Rosie Wing's room with Rosie lying dead on the floor. Although never diagnosed by a physician, Capson's lawyer argued that Capson was an epileptic and if he had committed a crime it was during a black-out spell caused by epilepsy. Capson's mother had suspected that he had a medical problem and did take him to his family doctor but nothing was confirmed.

Family members and friends testified that Capson at times exhibited periods of bizarre and violent behaviour after which he was unaware of what had taken place. Expert medical witnesses testified that memory lapses and

periods of bizarre and violent behaviour could be caused by epilepsy but excessive alcohol consumption would need to be ruled out first.

On March 7, 1952 the jury found Donald Capson guilty of murdering Rosie Wing. They also gave a strong recommendation for mercy. Judge Anglin, however, imposed the death penalty and sentenced him to hang on June 11, 1952.

Donald Capson appealed his sentence to the Supreme Court of New Brunswick and was refused. He then appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada and they agreed to hear his case. On December 22, 1952 he was granted a new trial. It was determined that although witnesses testified as to Capson's state of intoxication on the day of the murder, this aspect of the case was not adequately investigated as it should have been.

Also, the judge did not instruct the jury to take Capson's "state of drunkenness" into consideration and to determine if he was capable on that day to have the intent of committing murder. Without proving this intent beyond a reasonable doubt, the Supreme Court stated that in such cases "the charge of murder must then be reduced to manslaughter".

Donald Capson's new trial began on February 24, 1953. Again it was held in Dorchester and all of the witnesses who testified at his first trial were heard. No new evidence was presented but there was more discussion regarding Capson's physical and mental state before and during the day of the incident. On February 27 he was found guilty of manslaughter in the death of Rosie Wing and was sentenced to ten years in Dorchester Penitentiary.

Donald Capson served his sentence and when released came back to Moncton. He died in 1988. Like Rosie Wing and her husband Charles, Capson was laid to rest in Elmwood Cemetery.

Historian Pat Winans is a regular contributor to Come On In! magazine. ... You can read more "Remember When?" features at comeonin.ca

