

FROM THE MORGUE OF THE WESTFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND THE WESTFIELD LEADER

MURDER AND INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE IN SLEEPY SUBURBIA

BY BETSEY BURG DORF

Every town has a history. Some towns have a past. It is hard to imagine, especially for those who live here, that a quaint, picturesque town like Colonial Westfield could be the backdrop for a host of unrelated murders. Although some of the motives seem to be as unique as the perpetrators themselves, be it pride, greed, retaliation or a loose temper, Westfield tried not to let the fabric of its close-knit community unravel from the unwanted notoriety attained from the crimes.



Murder and intrigue in Westfield—a town that at times seems to exist within a protective armor separating it from the evils of the world—goes back more than two centuries.

WHEN JAMES MORGAN WAS HUNG

Almost 225 years ago, on November 14, 1781, the Rev. James Caldwell was shot on the causeway at the Elizabethtown Port by American sentinel James Morgan. Caldwell was the circuit pastor for Westfield's Presbyterian Church and other congregations in the area.

Caldwell had intended to visit Berlah Murray who was aboard a sloop docked at the wharf, but was informed she had gone ashore to visit her sister, but had left behind a package for Caldwell. Sentinel James Morgan intercepted Caldwell as he was returning with the package and insisted that he inspect its contents.

When Caldwell refused and tried to return with the package to the ship, Morgan shot him with his musket. Morgan was tried and convicted of murder in Westfield on January 29, 1782. He was taken to the church and

then hung on the Scudder Farm, at what is now called Gallows Hill.

The motive for Morgan's action is still unknown. Some accounts say he was strictly following orders not to allow the passage of un-inspected packages; others say Morgan was bribed by the British to murder the active patriot.

Some reports claim Morgan is buried in an unmarked grave in the revolutionary cemetery across the street from the Presbyterian Church. Other accounts place Morgan's remains on Scudder's farm on Gallows Hill Road.

BALTUS ROLL GOT CLUBBED

What would be dubbed the "murder of the century" began on a sprawling farm in Springfield. Baltus Roll, a farmer and member of the Presbyterian Church in Westfield, was attacked and left to die by two men at his farmhouse in 1831. The intruders attacked Roll and tied him up in an attempt to learn the location of the successful farmer's legendary hidden fortune.

According to Baltus's wife's account, the couple had gone to bed early and were awakened by a midnight pounding on the door. Two men entered the house and dragged Mr. Roll out of bed. He was attacked and tortured by two strangers in an attempt to make him reveal the hiding place of his money. They took him outside and left him for dead in a snow bank. Mrs. Roll fled the house in a panic, running through the woods, returning to her husband's lifeless body in the morning.

The prime suspects in the case were Peter B. Davis and Lycidias Baldwin, who had a

local reputation for causing trouble. Davis was arrested but later acquitted despite overwhelming evidence of his guilt because certain testimony was ruled "illegal." After hearing of Davis's arrest, but prior to his acquittal, Baldwin committed suicide while in jail.

Golf Club, home of 15 USGA National Championships, was opened.

BIG WOODS MYSTERY

In 1888, in the woods belonging to the property at 229 East Dudley Avenue, the body of Edward Miller was discovered. Fredrick Baldwin was tried and found not



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WESTFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
SERIOUS ABOUT CRIME - THE WESTFIELD POLICE FORCE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY.

Baltus Roll is buried in the Presbyterian Church's Revolutionary Cemetery on Mountain Avenue. On his gravestone can be found the unusual, but true, statement "Murdered."

Perhaps the most interesting outcome of Roll's murder is the legacy he left behind. Roll had no children, and local residents bought the property after his wife died. The Roll farm was transformed into a golf course and by the 1890's the prestigious Baltusrol


guilty. The case was never solved. It is still known today as the "Big Woods Murder Mystery."

HALLOWEEN PRANK TURNS DEADLY


On Halloween night October 31, 1904, Harold Willcox fired a shot with his .32 that killed 11 year-old John Darling. At the corner of Park and Westfield Avenue, a group of

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