

**HISTORY: MURDER AND INTRIGUE IN SUBURBIA**

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children were playing Halloween pranks and Willcox would tell authorities he “merely intended to frighten the children.” He was represented by Richard Lindabury and was acquitted.

**JOHN LIST**

By the time John E. List, Westfield’s most notorious criminal, was caught in 1989 at the age of 63, 17 and a half years after the brutal murder of his entire family, the story was no longer front-page news. But the murders — which claimed the lives of his mother, Alma List, his wife, Helen List and their three children Patricia, 18, John Jr., 15 and Frederick, 13 — were not forgotten.

Although the house no longer stands high atop the hill on affluent Hillside Avenue, it is not uncommon for residents to drive out-of-towners by pointing out the lot where the 18-room mansion, Breeze Knoll, once stood.

John List, originally from Bay City, Michigan, moved his family to Westfield in the early 1960s. He financed the \$100,000 house with the help of his mother. But the no nonsense accountant soon found he was living well above his means. He was in debt and struggling to afford the lifestyle he had created.

Unbeknownst to his family, he lost his job as a certified public accountant and insurance salesman at State Mutual Association of Orange. He left every morning under the false pretense that he was going to work, only to spend the entire day in the Westfield train station.

The disappearance of the children, who were students at Westfield High School and Roosevelt Intermediate School, did not arouse suspicion because List had carefully orchestrated their absence. Superintendent of Schools Lillard E. Law received letters from Mr. List in early November 1971, stating that the children would be away on an extended trip to North Carolina.

On December 7, 1971, neighbors became concerned reportedly not having seen the family for approximately a month and called police. Patrolmen George Zhelesnik and Charles Heller were dispatched to the scene where they saw a body on the floor and immediately called headquarters.

Police forced their way into the home to discover the bodies of Mrs. List and the children in bloodied sleeping bags in the empty ballroom of the home. His mother’s body was found in the hallway on the third floor. (“P.S. Mother is in the hallway in the attic — 3rd floor. She was too heavy to move,” List’s confession would read.)

John List had shot his entire family to death. (“It may seem cowardly to have shot them from behind but I didn’t want any of



POLICE posted the above pictures and description of John List in 1971. Inset, a police sketch of what List would look like today, 16 years later.

FOR FULL DETAILS, SEE [WWW.GOLEADER.COM/LIST](http://WWW.GOLEADER.COM/LIST)

them to know even at the last second that I had to do this to them, his confession would also state.”)

It was determined that he shot his wife at the breakfast table. Then climbed the stairs to third floor, where his mother would meet her similar fate. He systematically killed his children as they returned home from school lining them up next to his wife in the ballroom, where he had drug her body from the kitchen.



WESTFIELD POLICE CHIEF JAMES T. MORAN 1971 ARCHIVES

The investigation immediately focused on the only missing member of the family. Suspicions were quickly confirmed. A three-page confession was turned over by his pastor, Rev. Eugene Rehwinkel, of the Redeemer Lutheran Church. Rev. Rehwinkel originally refused to turn the confession over, claiming it was privileged, but eventually lost the battle.

“Dear Pastor Rehwinkel, ...I know what has been done

is wrong from all that I have been taught and that any reasons that I might give will not make it right. But you are the one person that I know that while not condoning this will at least possibly understand why I felt I had to do this,” read the hand written confession.

“I wasn’t earning anywhere near enough to support us. Everything I tried seemed to fall to pieces. True we could have gone bankrupt & maybe gone on welfare.

But that brings me to my next point. Knowing the type of location one would have to live in plus the environment for the children plus the effect on them knowing they were on welfare was just more than I thought they could & would endure...”

It is believed that Mr. List fled by train to Michigan and then Denver, CO where he set up residence. He would eventually marry a woman from his local church.

Mr. List remained at large for almost two decades, living in Virginia under the alias Robert P. Clark until he was profiled in 1989 on the television show, “America’s Most Wanted,” which crafted a clay bust depicting what List, 17 years older, might pres-

ently look like.

Mr. List was captured on June 1, 1989. After approximately 110 witnesses including Detective Lt. Bernard Tracy of the Westfield Police Department and Superior Court Judge William L’E Wertheimer, a Westfield resident who sentenced John Emil List to five consecutive life sentences without the possibility of parole. He is currently serving his sentence at the Trenton State Prison.

Almost as ironic as “America’s Most Wanted” being one of Mr. List’s favorite shows was the fact that in the ballroom hanging high above the bodies of his beloved family was the answer to John List’s debt. The glass ceiling of the ballroom was a signed Tiffany original that came crashing down in August 1972 when the house, as well as its owner disappeared in a puff of smoke.

A fire of unknown origin leveled the mansion, leaving only a charred memory of the evil that once lurked behind its walls. Fire

Chief Norman Ruerup deemed the fire “of a suspicious nature.” The cause of the fire, thought to be the work of an arsonist, is still unknown.

Just when residents had all but accepted John List’s unforgivable crime, 23 year-old Linda Sisko was killed in her South Avenue apartment by her boyfriend Jacob Ehrlich after the couple had a fight in 1974.

In July 1976 a local neighborhood was in a state of terror when Lena Triano was stabbed and killed and Josephine Piansecka was stabbed in their Cacciola Place homes.

**THE LEADER MURDER**

Almost as notorious as the John List Murder is what the media dubbed The Leader Murders. A bizarre set of circumstances that would once again shake the town to its core. It was a crime scene very different from the List murders, but with more than one common thread.

Kurt Bauer, who would eventually become owner of *The Westfield Leader*, purchased the vacant lot on Hillside Avenue that was once the scene of five grisly murders. Here, he made his home. After moving, he died in 1995 from an illness. His brother, Jeffrey L. Bauer, 48, took over the helm as publisher. His mother Katherine Bauer would remain on the masthead as co-publisher.

Only weeks after the loss of her son Kurt, Katherine witnessed the brutal murder of her son Jeffrey at the hands of his estranged wife Meta Bauer inside *The Leader* office located at the time on 50 Elm Street.

Meta Bauer was considered by most to be attractive, bright and funny. At 46, she had been married numerous times and was on her way to divorce number three.

Meta Bauer, whose son Nicholas Loeb from a previous marriage to John Loeb, Jr. a

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