

William Burton, 45, Father Of Five, Victim Of Shotgun

Above: Headline for the *Portsmouth Times* October 28, 1932

In this edition of the *Time Traveler* we will be looking at the case of William Burton of Lucasville from 1932.

Phrases like “tangled love affair” and “cold blooded murder” usually aren’t heard in Scioto County, Ohio, but during the early 1930’s the *Portsmouth Times* was riddled with these words due to one tangled murder.

“Lucasville Man Slain In Home While Talking With His Family” was the bold headline that ran across the front page of the *Times* on Friday, October 28, 1932. William Burton, 45, father of five who lived on West Street in Lucasville was the victim of a brutal murder on Thursday night. Burton was enjoying a quiet evening with his wife and children when a bullet shattered the glass of the window he was sitting in front of and embedded itself into his skull, killing him instantly. Neighbors heard his wife’s hysterical shrieks and rushed to assist her.

After statements were taken, police discovered from Burton’s children that a man they knew was spotted hanging around the house minutes after the murder: Thomas Perkins, distant relative of William’s wife. Perkins said he left the Burton home about 10 pm to go stay with his sister, Mrs. Workmen, at Nauvoo. Ultimately, Perkins was released for lack of evidence.

“Three Held In Burton Killing” would be the headline for the Sunday, November 6, 1932 edition of the *Times*. William Burton’s wife Mary, his brother Joseph, and a family friend, Grover Doss, were all brought in for questioning after suspicions began to arise. Unable to shed light on the murder, they were released.

The case would remain unsolved and with no further leads for two years. Then on Monday, October 29, 1934 a shocking headline found its way into the *Portsmouth Times* saying “Burton Admits Part In Killing.” Joseph Burton, William Burton’s brother, made a jarring claim nearly two years after his brother’s murder. Burton claimed that he had overheard Mrs. Burton and Grover Doss, the family friend, plotting William’s murder and had been “eased into” helping them with it.

In the weeks that followed, accounts by Burton, Doss, and Mrs. Burton changed so much it was ambiguous as to exactly what actually occurred. The only clear thing that did emerge from their tale was the motive. Grover Doss and Mary Burton wanted to continue having an affair. Joseph burton was carrying on an illicit relationship with his niece Carrie Shultz. Both wanted William killed because he stood in the way. On Thursday, March 28, 1935, nearly two and a half years after William Burton’s murder, Joseph Burton was found guilty of murdering his brother. A mercy verdict was suggested by the court in which Joseph Burton was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Ohio penitentiary. Upon hearing this verdict, Joseph was heard saying “the verdict is not just” in a stoic voice. The following day, he filed for a new trial in common pleas court. In April of 1935, Mrs. Mary Burton was charged with first degree murder of her husband William and also given a mercy verdict. She was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Women’s Reformatory in Marysville. On April 27, 1935, Grover Doss was acquitted of the murder charge filed against him.

Mary Burton ended up dying in the women’s reformatory in September of 1938.—KS

And this is just the basic story! Come to Local History to learn more about the details of this case by looking at old newspapers either on microfilm or on our database <https://access.newspaperarchive.com/>

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LOCAL MYSTERIES?

Below: image taken from the

Portsmouth Times March 28, 1935



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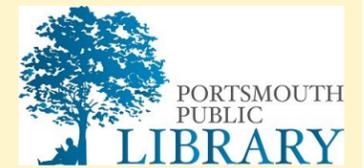
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Interested in being an Honorary *Time Traveler*? Send us a photo of you with your copy of *The Time Traveler* and you may just appear in a future edition!

Henry A. Lorberg Local History Department
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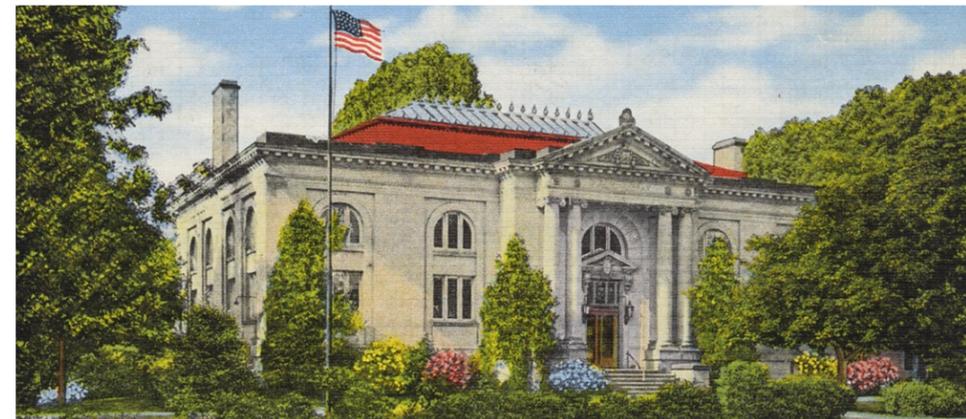


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ABOVE: Erik Strindberg, Portsmouth architect, 1930. BELOW: Nils Strindberg, Erik’s brother, brilliant student in physics and chemistry, most notably one of three members of the ill-fated 1897 Andrée Arctic balloon expedition to the North Pole. (Sources: Access Newspaper Archive, MyHeritage Database)



The Time Traveler

Portsmouth Past and Present

BY TARYN MIRABELLO AND KAITLIN SETTY

Welcome to the second edition of *The Time Traveler: Portsmouth Past and Present!* Our goal is to bring Scioto County, Ohio’s past to life through engaging articles, archives and images that residents can be proud to share today. Be on the lookout for our next issue in July!

FORGOTTEN HISTORY: PORTSMOUTH’S UNLIKELY CONNECTION TO THE HEROIC AGE OF ARCTIC EXPLORATION

On Saturday, August 23, 1930, residents of Portsmouth awakened to a curious headline in the *Daily Times*: “Explorer, Who Perished, Brother of Local Architect: Strindberg’s Body Found in Frozen North.” The Portsmouth architect was Erik Strindberg; the doomed explorer his brother, Nils. The discovery of Nils’ and his two companions’ bodies on White Island in August 1930 some thirty-three years after they vanished was international news. However, the fact that Nils’ brother Erik lived in Portsmouth, Ohio at the time of the discovery and gave exclusive interviews to the *Times* about the tragedy lent a unique personal perspective to the *Daily Times* articles that national newspapers lacked. In July 1897, Swedish explorers Nils Strindberg, Knut Frankel and their leader, Major S. A. Andrée, set off from their base in Spitsbergen, Norway aboard a hydrogen balloon in an attempt

Story continued on page 3



Our April/May/June issue's Timeless Treasure comes from our online digital collection. It is a railroad bond from the Scioto & Hocking Valley Railroad Company. This bond would provide the borrower with extended funds to finance long term investments. It dates back to 1854.

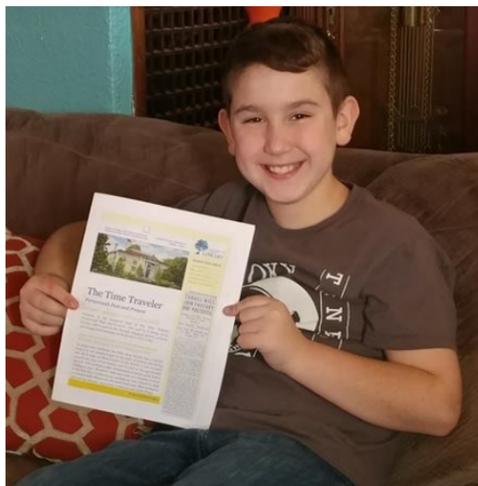
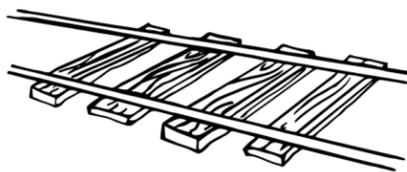
The Scioto & Hocking Valley Railroad was the first railroad in Scioto County. It was organized in 1849, with construction beginning in 1850.

FROM THE VAULT: THIS ISSUE'S TIMELESS TREASURE

The line would connect Portsmouth to Newark in Licking County and ultimately form a Junction with the Marietta & Cin. Railroad in Vinton County, Ohio.

Access this and thousands of other timeless treasures via our Local History Online Digital Collection, available for the public to view 24/7 at <https://www.yourppl.org/history/>.

Have a Timeless Treasure of your own you would like to share? Contribute images of your regional historical interest items at <https://www.yourppl.org/history/contribution>. —KS



HONORARY TIME TRAVELER

Brailon McFann is our first-ever Honorary Time Traveler. A life-long patron of the South Webster Branch Library, he is ten years old and is a 4th grader at Bloom-Vernon. He wants to be an architect when he grows up. He loved the first issue of *The Time Traveler* and says he plans to collect them all!

WHO AM I?

Clue #1: I was born in Portsmouth, Ohio on August 1, 1856.

Clue #2: My father was the leading merchant tailor of Portsmouth for nearly half a century.

Clue #3: I was a widely known historian and writer for Portsmouth.

Clue #4: Perhaps my most notable contribution to Portsmouth was when I obtained \$50,000 from Andrew Carnegie for the erection of the public library.

Who am I with the initials H. L.?



Hold your copy of *The Time Traveler* up to a mirror and the answer will magically appear below!

ANSWER: I am Henry Taylor McFann. My father's name is Brailon.

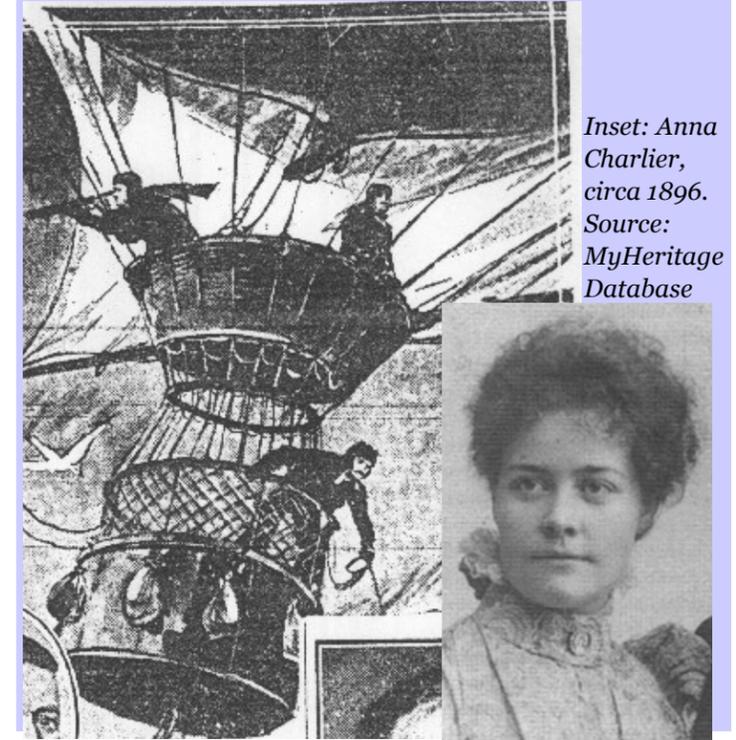
to be the first humans in recorded history to reach the North Pole. Soon thereafter, they vanished. For thirty-three years, the trio's fate remained the greatest unsolved mystery of polar exploration.

Fast-forward to August 1930. Erik Strindberg, native of Sweden and the brother of Nils, is a prominent architect in Portsmouth, Ohio, having moved to the area in 1925 as construction superintendent of the \$1,000,000 Scioto County Courthouse project. When news of the discovery broke, the architect promptly informed the *Daily Times* on August 23, 1930 that in 1897 he "received a letter [from his brother Nils] written the day before the balloon started for the pole. In the letter, the brother [Nils] mentioned that he was not satisfied with conditions, stressing the fact that sufficient varnish had not been furnished for the balloon covering."

This was not the only time Mr. Strindberg spoke exclusively with the *Daily Times* about his brother's fatal polar voyage—in a chivalrous gesture, however, he focused not on his own grief, but on that of the woman who was to have been his sister-in-law. An August 27, 1930 *Times* article relates: "A comely Swedish girl waited fifteen years for her fiancé who never came back from a dash into the Arctic vastness with Auguste Andrée, it was revealed here today by Erik Strindberg, Portsmouth architect. The girl, Anna Charlier, was engaged to Nils, the brother related today. For more than a decade she waited, believing him alive, but lost in the icy wastes. Then hope faded and she married a New Hampshire college professor. When the [brothers'] father, Johann Oscar, died, he bequeathed Nils' share of his estate to his lost son's fiancé."

Months later, on March 22, 1931, the *Times* revealed, "Brother of Erik Strindberg First Of Party To Die." Perhaps this was a source of relief to Erik in that his brother did not suffer as long as his companions. Of the three men, Strindberg was the only one to be buried. He "had been laid in a narrow cleft between rocks and the remains covered with a foot-thick layer of rubble stones. There was found, where the left hand had been, Nils Strindberg's engagement ring." Andrée, the last to die, had in his pockets "a gold heart-shaped locket with the monogram 'N.S.," with, inside, the portrait of Strindberg's

Below: Illustration of the ill-fated polar balloon expedition: "Observe the peculiar construction of the double basket." Source: Portsmouth Daily Times, Tuesday, August 26, 1930.



Inset: Anna Charlier, circa 1896. Source: MyHeritage Database

fiancée and a lock of hair," presumably to return to Miss Charlier in the event Andrée made it back to civilization. The sacredness with which these objects were treated in the men's final dying days echoes the devotion Erik Strindberg first reported to the *Times* as existing between Nils and his fiancée.

Erik Strindberg was taken by a heart attack at his Portsmouth residence after listening to a broadcast about world affairs on March 12, 1944. After listing his most notable architectural accomplishments including Portsmouth's Harry E. Taylor Mansion and Roosevelt School, Mr. Strindberg's front-page *Portsmouth Daily Times* obituary poignantly closes by noting that he was preceded in death "by a brother, Nils, a noted Swedish scientist, who died on an expedition in 1897 in the Arctic."

As for Anna Charlier, she and her college professor husband eventually settled in Torquay, England, but according to a Strindberg relative who visited her there in 1947, she never recovered from the loss of her first love. She left specific instructions that upon her death, her heart was to be removed from her body, cremated and buried next to Nils Strindberg's remains in Stockholm.

When she died in 1949, her wish was granted.—TM