

# AGED WOMAN IS SLAIN BY YOUTH



Mrs. J. Moses Hess, aged 75, was stabbed to death Thursday morning at her home on Olentangy road, near Dodridge street, by David Steele, 17-year-old boy employed on the Hess farm. She was a member of a pioneer Franklin county family, owners for many years of large tracts of land northwest of Columbus.

CITATION (TURABIAN STYLE)

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# DISSATISFACTION WITH PAY LEADS TO BRUTAL CRIME

**David Steele, Aged 17, Shoots  
Self After Stabbing Mrs.  
J. M. Hess to Death.**

## ROBBERY STORY UNTRUE

**Breaks Down and Admits  
Slaying Woman When Ques-  
tioned by Prosecutor King.**

## HIS CONDITION IS SERIOUS

**Hess Family Among Pioneers  
in Central Ohio and Owned  
Large Land Tracts.**

Lying on a hospital bed, with a bullet in his body, David Steele, 17-year-old youth, Thursday night told the story of a brooding resentment which led him to murder, with a butcher knife, Mrs. J. Moses Hess, aged 75, member of a prominent Franklin county family, and then, in fear of being caught, to attempt his own life. The tragedy was enacted some time Thursday morning, in the homestead of the Hess family, on the Olentangy road, just south of Dod-ridge street.

The boy's confession was drawn from him by County Prosecutor John King, when in his room at Mt. Carmel hospital the lad finally admitted he had trumped up the story of a negro intruder who had stabbed the woman and shot him. Mrs. Hess and David Steele, who had done chores about the Hess farm for three years, were left alone in the house Thursday morning when, at an early hour, J. Moses Hess, the murdered woman's husband, and his two daughters, Elizabeth and Flora, went into the city.

## DISSATISFIED WITH PAY.

It was the lad's duty to help with the churning, which had apparently been done, to assist Mrs. Hess in other ways in the kitchen and to do necessary work on the farm itself. One of these latter tasks was to bring in corn each morning from the patch at the rear of the farm yard. It was when young Steele set out on this errand, he told Prosecutor King, that he determined to murder his benefactress. The feeling that the sums of money which the family gave him in addition to his room and board were not enough, had long been in his mind. Originally taken into the family on the condition that he would work for his room and board, Steele had been given from \$3 to \$5 a week in addition to this.

When the boy re-entered the kitchen of the house, carrying a basket of corn, he saw a butcher knife on the kitchen table. At once

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# DISSATISFACTION WITH PAY LEADS TO BRUTAL CRIME

(Continued from Page One.)

his long-planned scheme leaped to conclusion. Setting down his basket he grabbed up the knife and stabbed Mrs. Hess, who was busily engaged in her morning tasks. Startled and dazed she turned to him and said, "Oh, David!" the boy told King. Then he stabbed her again and again. Coroner J. A. Murphy later found 16 wounds, three of which had pierced the jugular vein.

## DECIDED TO KILL SELF.

Mrs. Hess fell upon the floor of the kitchen. The only thing to break the silence that followed was the frightened squawking of a large green parrot, hung in its cage by the kitchen window. Dropping the knife to the floor, Steele thought to escape. But the fear of being caught and of having to face his crime was too great. He decided to end his own life.

In Mr. Hess' room, on the first floor, the lad knew that two revolvers were kept, wrapped in a piece of flannel, one an old-fashioned six-shooter, the other a modern 32-caliber pistol, in the drawer of a washstand. He then ran upstairs to the bathroom, where he thought first of drowning himself, but his efforts to keep his head under the water did not succeed. So throwing himself into the tub, he turned the pistol on his body, trying, he said, to find his heart. The bullet entered, however, through the abdomen on the right side.

The slayer then crawled into a bed in one of the Hess daughters' rooms. He seemed uncertain as to when the murder occurred, but a gold watch belonging to him was afterwards found in this room by police. It was broken and had stopped at 11 minutes of 10 o'clock.

Young Steele made efforts to wash his clothing, officers discovered, portions of which he had taken off and concealed in the bed. The revolver he left in the bath room. He lay on the bed in the quiet second floor room at least five hours, suffering greatly from internal convulsions and planning his story of the mythical colored man.

## FOUND DOOR LOCKED.

The Hess family returned to their home about 3:30 o'clock. Startled when they found the back door locked, for it was always left open, they entered by a side door. Mrs. Hess' body was soon found. From upstairs came the sound of groans and they hurried to Steele. He told them briefly his story of the murder and shooting. He came into the kitchen, he said, and found the negro bending over Mrs. Hess. He cried out and the negro fired at him.

Mr. Hess first called Denton, Donaldson & Hughes, undertakers, who informed the sheriff's office and police. When the latter arrived they quickly saw the glaring flaws in the boy's story. The locked door, the gun in the bath room, the efforts to wash away the blood and the lack of any trail of blood from the kitchen to the room where he was found, disproved his story that he had been shot while on the floor below. He was taken to Mt. Carmel hospital, however, before he could be questioned, and even there confessed to Prosecutor King only after great persuasion. His condition on Friday morning was reported as critical and he may not survive the day.

## PIONEER RESIDENTS.

The Hess family is one of the pioneer Central Ohio families. Mr. J. Moses Hess' grandfather, Balthazar Hess, was the first settler in the wide region between the forks of the Olentangy and Scioto rivers and the city of Delaware.

Mr. Hess, husband of the murdered woman, has at times owned many hundreds of acres of land in this region; his present holdings now totaling about 100 acres. The family is reputed among the wealthiest in this region, and has many connections in central Ohio.

Flora Louise Hess, one of the daughters, is employed at the Ackerman Floral Co. The other, Elizabeth, is at home. A son, Benjamin C., 57 West Duncan street, is at present out of the city. Other relatives are a brother, Adelman Fairfield of Normal, Ill., two grandchildren and Charles Hess of Columbus and William Hess, Dayton, nephews of Mr. Hess, and Mrs. Florence Willison, 36 West Tenth avenue, and Mrs. Ida Freer, New York, nieces. Mr. and Mrs. Hess lived at the Olentangy road home for 52 years, having celebrated their golden wedding anniversary there in 1921.

Mrs. Hess' funeral will be held from the residence Monday at 2:30 p. m. with burial in Union cemetery.

## LEFT FATHER'S HOME.

Steele is the son of David Steele, sr., 345 North Twentieth street, and is the child of a former marriage. Discontent in his father's present household led him to seek a home outside. His place with the Hess family brought him near to Laneview school, where he attended. He was reputed of average brightness and of an uncomplaining and amiable disposition. "He never gave any of us a cross word," one of the daughters said Thursday. His animosity manifested itself only in a disinclination to appreciate kindnesses, it was said. He was taciturn and kept much to himself, going to his father's home every Sunday morning, but remaining at the farm most of his time.

Dr. Wells Teachnor operated on the boy, but did not remove the bullet which had penetrated to his right lung.

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# BULLET WOUND FATAL TO YOUTHFUL SLAYER

## David Steel, Aged 17, Who Confessed Murder of Mrs. J. M. Hess, Dies in Hospital.

David Steel, 17-year-old youth who confessed to the murder of Mrs. J. Moses Hess, aged 74, Thursday at her home on the Olentangy river road, where he had been employed as a farm hand, died late Friday afternoon at Mt. Carmel hospital from a self-inflicted bullet wound.

Young Steel shot himself after he had slain the aged woman with a butcher knife. Only an hour before his death a charge of murder in the first degree had been filed against him in the juvenile court by County Detective Raymond A. Phelan.

Private funeral services will be held Monday at 2 p. m. at the home of the boy's father, David Steel, sr., 345 North Twentieth street. Interment will be in Green Lawn cemetery.

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*Columbus Dispatch* (Columbus, Ohio), August 19, 1922: 3. *NewsBank: Access World News - Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.webproxy3.columbuslibrary.org/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A1467499E363272B3%40EANX-NB-163D89816047B7E5%402423286-163D84216FAC6ACE%402-163D84216FAC6ACE%40>.

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