

A stone in Highland Cemetery has the following imprint:
Naomi Etta Mitchell, daughter of Phineas Y. and Evelyn C.
Mitchell. March 21, 1898 to July 24, 1912. Murdered by J. Sherman
Gray of Carmel. Erected by her friends.

Bangor Daily News - July 26, 1912

REVOLTING CRIME DEED OF MADMAN

Murder and worse enacted on a lonely road in Carmel just at dusk on Wednesday - pretty Naomi Mitchell, aged 14, victim of maniacal fury-her naked and mutilated body found on Thursday - Sherman Gray, idiot or lunatic, missing and suspected.

A murder marked by cool deliberation and peculiar brutality was disclosed in the little town of Carmel about 13 miles west of Bangor at 9 o'clock Thursday morning, when a group of men who had searched for hours found in a strip of woods the mutilated, blood-smearred, partially nude body of Naomi Etta Mitchell, daughter of a Carmel farmer.

The girl lay upon her back just inside the strip of woods and perhaps 35 rods from the road. Her hands were tied behind her with strips of cloth, and a gag of cloth had been thrust into her delicate mouth, although the assailant evidently had later torn it loose. Across the white throat, from ear to ear, was a cut from some sharp instrument-a clean, deep cut, which the physicians say must have made death instantaneous. Her clothing, tied neatly and carefully in a bundle, was lying close by.

She had been criminally assaulted and then murdered, or perhaps the murder occurred first, but of the assault, physicians say there is no doubt. The trampled grass by the roadside, mute evidence of a desperate but unequal struggle, showed how fiercely the frail victim had fought for her honor and her life.

Suspicion immediately fastened upon J. Sherman Gray, who had been employed for several weeks in the vicinity. On the evening previous he was known to have followed the girl when she left the general store for her home - at least he had been last seen walking in the direction she had taken. He was a man who was tolerated in the settlement, but who had few friends or intimates, and who was shunned, apparently for good reason. A few years before he had been arrested for mutilating cattle, but a municipal court judge had discharged him. A little later, in 1907, he had been again arrested, this time for stealing womens' garments - and he had been committed by Chief Justice Emery to

the Eastern Maine Insane Hospital, where upon the records he is designated as a 'congenital' imbecile. Discharged from the hospital in March of 1908, he had been employed as a laborer at odd jobs in the farming district near Bangor, finally landing in the town of Carmel. Ordinarily considered harmless and good-natured, and known as a hard and willing worker, he was subject to occasional attacks of a vicious mania, which manifested itself in moral perversion and attacks upon women and animals.

Gray, however, much as the townspeople and officials would like to have interviewed him, had disappeared. He is described as over six feet tall and strong in proportion, of light complexion, smooth face, and when last seen wore a large straw hat, coarse dark trousers, a blue jumper and rubber boots. At first the search for him was prosecuted vigorously; but as the hours dragged on, it slackened perceptibly and the searchers split into discouraged little groups. Gray is believed to be in hiding in the woods, and he knows every foot of the vicinity - every road and meadow, every farm and clump of bushes. Even so, it is believed that his capture is only a matter of hours or days.

Deputy Sheriff Garland left Bangor by automobile Thursday night, believing that he might be able to find Gray before morning. Nothing had been heard from him, however, up to the time the News went to press.

There was no more popular girl in Carmel than Naomi Mitchell, or one more honest and kindly. She was only fourteen, but she appeared considerably older, and her fine complexion and clear eyes would have marked her as pretty and attractive anywhere. Her father, Phineas Y. Mitchell, was in moderate, yet comfortable circumstances, and she was one of a large family - worshipped almost, by her younger brothers and sisters.

At 7:30 Wednesday night, Naomi appeared at the general store of George E. Mason & Co., in North Carmel, which is at the junction of the Fuller Road and the thoroughfare known as Horseback. There the girl commonly called to get a supply of groceries for the family. With her she carried a basket of eggs to exchange with cash for her purchases. Clad in her gingham dress and hatless, Naomi entered and seemed just as bright and happy as Mr. Mason and his partner Everett Getchell had always found her. Lounging near the store was J. Sherman Gray, who a few days previously had taken employment with Charles Hawes on the Horseback Road as farmhand. Hay was to be gathered and Gray had been engaged. Gray had been in the store only a short time and there was noticed nothing out of the ordinary with him. He had always been permitted to enter the store, but the residents of Carmel had no particular desire to become intimate with him.

As the girl came into the store, Gray, with the half dozen or more in the store, glanced at her and some of the men spoke. Gray said nothing, nor did his demeanor betray any interest in the girl.

Mr. Getchell waited upon Miss Mitchell, who purchased coffee, rolled oats, cream of tartar, soda, tea and lard - just the amount that she usually called for. To Mr. Getchell she tendered her basket of eggs and a twenty dollar bill from which to take the difference in cash, and the girl was given back her change. By this transaction, Mr. Getchell saw that the girl had in her purse, a ten dollar bill and a few one dollar bills, probably about \$14.00 or \$15.00 in all.

Dusk was just falling and Mr. Mason, who had stepped to the veranda of the small store, casually watched Gray walk up the Horseback Road. The man had reached a small bridge, when he retraced his steps to the junction and Mr. Mason saw him pass up the Fuller Road in the direction that the Mitchell girl had taken. That was the last time that anyone, so far as known, saw Gray.

Later on, Mason's store, destined later to be the central point of interest to inquiring officials and newspaper men, was closed for the night. Gray was not seen again nor was there an inkling of the terrible crime that had been committed.

As night came on, Phineas Y. Mitchell, the father, sat in his modest farmhouse on the Pomeroy Road, attending to the wants of his wife, Naomi, after whom the little victim had been named, and who was in confinement, a child having been born on Monday last. At first not much worry was entertained for the tardy daughter, as it was thought that she might have stopped at a neighbor's house for a short visit.

One o'clock Thursday morning came and the father became alarmed. Hurriedly, he spread the news of the disappearance and it was not long before willing neighbors had organized a searching party. From Mason's store up the Fuller Road and the Pomeroy, the men searched, but darkness was a handicap and the work went for naught. There was a slight respite, and at daybreak the hunt was resumed.

This time the searchers were successful, for shortly before nine o'clock, they found neatly piled upon the side of the Fuller Road about three-quarters of a mile from the Mason store, the purchases that the girl had made. Nearby was her wallet,

containing about \$14.00. Marks of a terrible struggle appeared in the dust.

One sharp-eyed farmer, his countenance showing the strain under which he with the others was working, discovered the footprints of the girl where she had turned, evidently, and faced her assailant.

It was easy to mark the course of the struggle on the side of the road. Here the girl had fought with great strength in the emergency. There, about five rods distant, she had been hurled to the ground. A side comb was a further evidence of the attack. At this point the prints in the road ceased, and the posse saw, leading from the road, a trail of downtrodden grass through which someone had walked or a body had been dragged.

About 45 rods away was a woods just beyond a field, and over this field the farmers hastened. To the lot of Henry Murphy of Carmel fell the terrible discovery. In among the trees not far from the clearing, was the body of the girl.

The first sight that caught the eye was the girl's throat, cleanly gashed. She lay upon her back, practically nude, her clothes tied in a bundle and placed at one side. Her hair disheveled and small hands clenched graphically told of the battle she had waged first for her honor and then for her life. Her hands were tied with strips of cloth behind her back and across her mouth was a gag of cloth securely knotted back of her head. The bandage across the mouth had been cut when the fiend had ended life with the gash across the throat.

There was evidence of maltreatment, the whole case establishing that the deed must have been the act of a degenerate or a madman.

Sheriff White arrived from Bangor at 12:30 and directed that the body be removed to E.L. Lamb's undertaking rooms in Carmel village, where Dr. Lewis Robinson made an examination. County Attorney Thompson, Deputy Sheriff Garland, and Medical Examiner Nealey of Bangor arrived later, and an autopsy was held. The result of this autopsy has not yet been officially announced, although it is stated by one of the physicians that there is no doubt that the girl was criminally assaulted.

County Attorney Thompson talked with Mrs. Stevens, the mother of Sherman Gray, and she as well as the others feared that her son was answerable for the crime. The family assured the county attorney that if Sherman should return home at any time they would notify the authorities. It seemed to be the general

opinion, in any event, that he would be safer in the custody of the authorities, for it was feared that some Carmelite might take the law into his own hands.

The family was emphatic in their assertions that they did not know the whereabouts of the missing man. Mr. Stevens and his son Arthur, a manly young chap, half-brother to Sherman, talked willingly with County Attorney Thompson and the reporter. They had not seen Sherman since Tuesday. He had been at home then, having lived with Mr. Stevens and his mother when he was not working on some farm in the vicinity.

Recently Gray has been employed at haying by Charles Hawes but has not been seen at the Hawes place since Wednesday evening, when he left, saying that he was going to Mason's store. Mr. Hawes informed the officers that on Wednesday, just before he left for the store, Gray spent some time sharpening a large jack-knife on the grindstone in the yard. He left before haying had been completed.

Gray is an expert woodsman, able to make his way through the thickest forest tangle, and is familiar with the entire region, so that his capture will be difficult unless he comes into the open. He has a camp in the woods, and it is thought that he may have gone there, but at last accounts the pursuit had not been extended in that direction. There is a railroad station three miles from the scene of the crime, but so far as known Gray had no money, and it does not appear that he has reached the railroad. He left his rifle at home.

Mr. Gray is an able-bodied man and is about 33 years of age. His height is over six feet and he weighs between 180 and 200 pounds. His complexion is fair and his face smooth-shaven. His front teeth protrude slightly and he has an irresolute expression, generally wearing a vacant smile.

There is sorrow in Carmel upon the tragic death of pretty little Naomi Mitchell, whom everybody loved. Her full name was Naomi Etta Mitchell, and she made friends everywhere with her pleasant manner. She was the sixth of eleven children and besides attending school, assisted her mother in the housework and went on errands such as that, her last one, on Wednesday night.

On March 21st last, Naomi reached the age of 14 years, but she appeared older, being well developed for one of her years. Phineas Mitchell, the father, is an industrious farmer, who makes a living for his wife and many children. He is in moderate circumstances but his family has never wanted. The eldest child is about 24 years of age, and the youngest was born only last

Monday.

Up to midnight, no arrest had been made in connection with the murder and the whereabouts of Gray were still unknown.

No searching parties were out because of darkness. It is likely however, that if Gray is in the vicinity, he will be rounded up today.

Bangor Daily News - July 29, 1912

A THRILLING MANHUNT IN CARMEL

Elements of a second tragedy as posse of 150, fully armed, marched in one long line from Hampden Road to Railroad tracks - volunteers from a half dozen towns contributed to the most exciting Sunday that Carmel ever knew.

All day on Sunday in the little town of Carmel, there was a manhunt whose like was never known in the State of Maine. The fugitive was Sherman Gray, suspected of the murder last Wednesday of pretty Naomi Mitchell; and the pursuers were his former neighbors, it cannot be said his former friends, for, even in his best days, he had none.

Fully 300 joined in the search and nine out of every ten were armed. Yet Gray, without one person to give him aid, and designated on the hospital records as a 'congenital imbecile' successfully eluded them all - another surprising example of a madman's cunning. It was well for him that he did, for had he been taken by the searchers, especially if the three deputies had not happened to be present, the chances are fifty to one that he would never have lived to see the inside of a Bangor jail. This statement is not made to lend color to an episode which in itself was sufficiently dramatic and impressive; it is a simple statement of plain and very obvious fact. That he would have been hanged is unlikely; the deputies could have undoubtedly prevented this, but in the semidarkness of the woods the blow of some heavy club would have smashed in his skull, or a few bullets would have found lodgment in his body. This was the constant fear of the deputies, as expressed by one of them to the News - even had it not been obvious to the most casual observer, and while they had no definite plan of spiriting Gray away, in case of his capture by one of the more peaceful squads, they were keyed all day to a high tension of anxiety and excitement.

As a matter of fact, the whole town burned with excitement, it was the most strenuous day this usual placid vicinity has

known. Plans for a definite, systematic search for the murderer, extending to all of his accustomed haunts and possible hiding places, were laid while the funeral of the small victim was being held Saturday morning. This again sounds like an attempt to add a gratuitous touch of melodrama but it is perfectly true.

As the modest funeral procession disappeared, groups of grim-faced men gathered in the yard and neighboring road, and discussed their plan of vengeance - or, perhaps, of justice.

Bangor Daily News - July 30, 1912

Murderer is yet at large

Sherman Gray, now formally charged with the death of Naomi Mitchell, still eludes the posse of pursuers.

Monday was another disappointing day in the search for J. Sherman Gray, the Carmel farmhand, who is now formally charged by the authorities with having murdered 14-year-old Naomi Mitchell last Wednesday night. Reports of his capture were frequent, and clues were not lacking, but the reports were false, being inspired usually by vivid imagination, and the 'clues' were misleading.

It would seem, to the casual observer, that Gray must certainly have left this vicinity, and it is pointed out that this is the easiest, as well as the safest, thing for him to do. It is true that many of the roads and crossroads leading to and from Carmel, Kenduskeag and other towns of the vicinity are now picketed; but for several days following the murder there was nothing to prevent anybody after 10 o'clock at night from following one of them in almost perfect safety. During a pause in the big man-hunt on Sunday, one of the searchers recalled how, on a night recently, he had driven 25 or 30 miles straight through a number of villages, without meeting a soul. Therefore Gray may be by this time in another part of the state, in which the murder has attracted but little attention, and he could do this without going near the railroad tracks. It is hardly likely that he would wait until now, when the roads are picketed, before trying to escape.

Again, he may have plunged into the deep woods in the hope of reaching Canada, which would be his safest course. He could live on berries a long time, and his strength and knowledge of woodcraft would be invaluable.

REWARD IS OFFERED FOR SHERMAN GRAY

Sheriff White will pay this sum, and the state is asked to help. Pursuers again baffled Tuesday.

Tuesday's principal development in the Carmel murder case was the offer, made by Sheriff T. Herbert White, of \$200.00 to any person who will deliver J. Sherman Gray to the authorities.

Wishing to stimulate the search in every manner possible, and learning that the county commissioners have no authority to offer a reward, Sheriff White makes the offer personally, and will pay the money, should the alleged murderer be delivered, from his own pocket.

County Attorney Thompson has also taken up the matter of a reward and has sent the following self-explanatory communication to Governor Plaisted:

Bangor, July 29, 1912

Dear Sir:

On Wednesday night, July 24, a young woman named Naomi E. Mitchell, was killed in the town of Carmel in this county. It was one of the most brutal murders that has ever occurred in this commonwealth and the murderer is still at large.

After having made an examination I procured a warrant for murder against J. Sherman Gray of Carmel before the Bangor Municipal court on the 24th day of July.

It seems to me that a reward should be offered for his apprehension and I respectfully request that you cause to be offered a suitable reward for the arrest and delivery into custody of J. Sherman Gray.

No answer had been received at a late hour Tuesday night, and the News talked by long distance telephone to J. Clement Murphy, Governor Plaisted's private secretary.

"No action whatever has been taken on the matter", Mr. Murphy declared. "It is unusual for a county attorney to appeal for state funds in a case of this kind - at least I never heard of any precedent. I don't know the governor's sentiments, nor what he may do. All I know is that he has done nothing as yet." "When will action be taken?" "I don't know, I'm sure", answered Secretary Murphy. "It may be tomorrow morning, and it may not be for several days."

Aside from the offer of the reward, nothing definite

developed on Tuesday, and the whereabouts of Gray is just as great a mystery as on the night of the murder, now nearly a week ago. There is a possibility that he has escaped to another part of the state; it is generally believed that he is lurking in the woods near his home; he may be dead - although it does not appear that he had the courage to commit suicide.

Whatever the explanation, his hundreds of pursuers have thus far been completely baffled.

When the News went to press Tuesday morning, a squad of patrolmen were speeding by automobile to Northern Maine Junction, a man suspected of being Gray having been seen walking up the tracks in that direction. In the squad were Captains Sproul and Smith, Sergeant Daniel Smith and Patrolman Carey. Captain Sproul, who had driven out in the hope of finding the suspect on the road, returned almost immediately with the machine, leaving the others at the junction.

When dawn came they returned to the city on foot, following the railroad tracks and searching the woods, bushes and vacant buildings within a wide radius on either side. It was a long, hard job, and it yielded nothing, nobody even resembling the alleged murderer being discovered anywhere. Meantime early in the forenoon, Captain Sproul and Patrolman McAllister were driving out the Webster Road and made a thorough search of Graffam's woods.

This was the extent of police activity during the day, as there was apparently nothing further to be done. It is generally believed that the man seen near the Maine Central yards Monday night could not have been Gray despite the marked resemblance, but the police are only too glad to follow any clue brought to their attention.

Deputies Garland, Buswell and Packard, who are stationed in Carmel and will probably remain there until the search is over, on Tuesday turned their attention to the immediate scene of the crime. There is at this point a patch of woods perhaps 100 acres in extent, and two of the deputies made another search of it, proceeding very slowly and carefully. There was no trace of Gray, but they made one gruesome discovery. A part of the young victim's body, which had been missing, lay within twenty feet of the spot on which the murder was committed, and it seems strange that it had not been discovered before.

Pickets are still maintained on the roads leading to and from Carmel, and on many roads in the vicinity of Kenduskeag. But

on Tuesday, there were no big posses of pursuers, and there was nothing at all spectacular or sensational.

As usual, the sheriff's office, the police department, and the newspapers received scores of 'clues', the majority obviously absurd. All are patiently investigated, and this takes a great deal of time and energy.

For several days following the murder, there was but one theory as to Gray's whereabouts, everyone agreeing that he was lurking in the woods near home, and would return when impelled by hunger, as he had done several times before. As the days go by, however, four theories are discussed, one of which is undoubtedly correct, but just which one everybody in Carmel village would give a good deal to know.

First, Gray may have returned home on the night of the murder, secured money and a change of clothing, and made his escape to another part of the state. It is pointed out that five hours elapsed between the probable time of the murder and the discovery that Naomi Mitchell had not returned home; and there were thirteen hours between the murder and the finding of the body. Opposed to this theory are the circumstances that Gray did not touch Miss Mitchell's money, which was found near the body, and his only good suit is still hanging in the Stevens homestead. He has never been a thief, however, so far as articles of actual value were concerned, and he may possibly have been able to secure clothing belonging to his brothers.

Secondly, he may be hidden somewhere in the Stevens home, this being possible without the knowledge of his family. A search was made there Sunday morning, but one of the neighbors who took part in it said that if he had been given a little more time, he thought he could have discovered some possible hiding place which had been overlooked. "Easiest thing in the world for Sherman to have crawled into that mass of hay", this man declared to the reporters.

~~~~~

**SHERMAN GRAY CAPTURED IN THE TOWN OF BROOKS**

He admits his identity, admits having been in store on night of the murder, but denies any participation in the murder itself, is being brought to Bangor by Sheriff White.

J. Sherman Gray, wanted for the murder of little Naomi Mitchell, will in all probability be behind the bars in the Penobscot County Jail within a few hours. He is now in the

custody of Deputy Sheriff W.O. Estes in Brooks and will be hurried to Bangor as soon as an automobile can bring him.

At about dusk Tuesday night, a Mrs. Hall was walking along the road in the Hall Hill neighborhood about a mile from Brooks village when she came upon a man lying in the gravel by the side of the road. As she approached, he rose and walked along with her. He was in a deplorable condition, his clothes torn and ragged and apparently he was ill and weak.

He said that he had come a long way, that he had had nothing to eat for two days, and asked her if she knew where he could get something. She told him that she lived a little farther on and that she would be glad to give him something. He was taken into the house and while he was given a good supper, Deputy Sheriff Estes was notified. Meanwhile Mr. Hall, who had known Gray in Carmel, questioned him and he finally admitted that he was in the store at North Carmel last Wednesday night, but denied that he knew anything about the murder of the Mitchell girl.

He seemed indifferent to his situation and more interested in satisfying his appetite than anything else. When Deputy Sheriff Estes arrived, Gray showed no surprise and went with the deputy without question.

The jail office here was notified, Sheriff White was located at Monroe, and was expected to go at once to Brooks where Gray is guarded at the residence of Deputy Estes.

Viewed in light of the capture of Gray at Brooks, the statement of Edgar Robinson of Carmel to the effect that he was positive that he saw Gray on the Hampden Road about three miles southeast of Carmel village last Friday afternoon, can well be believed now. It is more than probable that Mr. Robinson was not mistaken.

In consequence of the story told by Mr. Robinson, the organized search by 300 men Sunday was directed in that vicinity. It was believed, however, that Gray had gone from the road where he was seen by Robinson into the woods on the East side of the highway, thereby staying in Carmel in the vicinity of his home. Robinson had hurried away at the time for his rifle, and so could not say as to which side of the road the man seen by him had chosen for further flight.

His capture in Brooks makes it certain that Gray took a westerly course, going through the towns of Newburg and Monroe after leaving Carmel. Had the man seen by Robinson gone into the woods on the west side of the Hampden road, and continued on his

course, he would have reached Newburg after a tramp of a mile through the thicket.

While hundreds of armed men were searching the woods in Carmel and Kenduskeag, and while scores of false clues were pouring in from all of the section of the county, Gray was traveling West. To reach the spot in which his capture was effected he had to travel about 25 miles, passing through the towns of Newburg and Monroe, but it does not appear that anybody in either town reported having seen him.

Whether Sherman Gray is guilty or not guilty of the murder, thousands of women in Penobscot County will this morning breathe easier.

J. Sherman Gray, confessed murderer of 14-year-old Naomi Mitchell, was brought into court yesterday and sentenced to life imprisonment in the state prison in Thomaston. Thus the last page is turned in one of the most famous of recent tragedies - a tragedy which caused a thrill of horror throughout Eastern Maine.

There were not more than 50 persons in the courtroom when Gray, handcuffed, was placed in the dock. He sat there five minutes or so before his case was reached, apparently taking no interest in the proceedings, his eyes fixed on the floor. Neatly dressed, save that he wore neither collar nor necktie, his great mop of reddish hair looked as though a comb had never touched it. He towered head and shoulders above the others in the dock.

The proceedings were very brief; those who expected a review of the crime, or any form of a trial, must have been disappointed.

"May it please the court", said County Attorney Thompson, "Jasper Sherman Gray, having pleaded guilty to the crime of murder, I now move that he be sentenced."

Justice King made out the commitment papers. "The respondent", he said slowly, "has pleaded guilty to the crime of murder, and the court has no sufficient ground on which to decline to accept his plea. I see no reason why he should not be sentenced for his crime, as the statute provides."

"Jasper Sherman Gray, stand up", ordered Clerk Stevens.

The prisoner rose and stood awkwardly, his manacled hands resting on the bronze rail, but still he displayed neither emotion nor interest.

"Jasper Sherman Gray", continued Mr. Stevens, "the court orders that you be sentenced to hard labor in the state prison at Thomaston, for the term of your natural life, and that you stand committed in execution of this sentence."

And this was all. Gray was led from the room by Sheriff White and the famous case was over.

It will be remembered that, early in the term, a motion asking that Gray be committed to the Eastern Maine Insane Hospital for observation was filed with Justice King by Attorneys Towle and Hutchings, who appeared for the defense. Justice King declined to grant this motion, issuing instructions that Gray was to plead for himself - which he did, the plea being a clean-cut one of guilty. And, as Justice King said yesterday: "The court has no sufficient grounds on which to decline to accept this plea."

Attorney Towle was in the room when sentence was passed, but he made no statement.

Newspaper reporting obtained from Bangor Daily News microfiche at Bangor Public Library.

\*\*\*\*\*