



Arthur Beardsley

Murder or Suicide? Mystery Remains a Haunting Question

By Kathy Jordan

Early on the cold morning of Jan. 4, 1938, Grand Junction Police officers discovered the car of Arthur Beardsley on the old Main Street bridge that went over the Colorado River, out to the Redlands. Beardsley was not to be found.

Authorities didn't know if it was a suicide or a murder. After all there were many unsolved crimes in Grand Junction in 1937 and 1938, running all the way from murders to petty robberies.

If it was a suicide he had taken elaborate measures before killing himself.

The evidence the police had to work with when the car was discovered is that the head lights were on, the car was running, blood splattered inside the car, his eye glasses in a small pool of blood on the left front side of the car, and one shoe was found on the driver's side

Beardsley always carried a blanket on the front seat and it was missing.

Beasley, who had a dental lab in the First National Bank building, was seen the night before leaving the bank building with two other men.

On the night before his disappearance he again told the story he had told many times of how, in 1934, he had given Albuquerque, N.M., authorities information on a planned kidnapping of Bruce Hebenstreit, son of A.R. Hebenstreit, a wealthy contractor in Albuquerque, which information he said broke up a kidnap gang. After the incident the Beardsley moved his family to Grand Junction out of fear for their safety.

Some said he had been in poor health. Others said his health had improved.

The police could find only smudges for fingerprints.

For days after the car was discovered authorities searched the river for Beardsley's body, but he couldn't be found.

On Jan. 8, 1938, Beardsley's hat was found by George Rupe and his daughter Flora while they were walking the river bank about two miles downstream from the bridge. The single bullet hole in the hat was at the back almost in the exact center through the outside band and sweat band. The powder burns surrounding the hole that indicated the shot had been fired from a close range. There was no blood in the hat

If the hat was being worn when the shot was fired, it struck the head almost in the direct center of the back and either remained in the head or ranged down and out through the face, as there was no mark of an exit of the bullet.

The authorities worked on the theory that Beardsley's body may have been thrown in the river at another location and the car was then driven to the bridge and abandoned.

After the news that Beardsley's hat had been found Maj. F.M. Carhartt , who was supervising a group of CCC boys who had joined in the search, reported that one of the CCC boys had found what appeared to be blood on some rocks along the shore opposite the point where the hat was picked up by Rupe.

Another person reported that he had been assaulted by two men downtown and the two asked him about the location of "some dental offices" in Grand Junction and something about 13th and Ouray. The Beardsley family lived in the 1300 block of Ouray.

A few nights before Beardsley was shot another dental laboratory in the First National bank building had been entered and several hundreds of dollars worth of dental supplies stolen.

Beardsley's body was found on the morning of April 8, 1938, about five miles downstream from the bridge. A search of his clothing found a watch, his business cards and a silver and turquoise ring he had been wearing. Robbery was ruled out.

The autopsy revealed the entry point for bullet was rather low in the back of his head and came from a .38 caliber revolver.

The coroner's inquest ruled that Beardsley was killed by person or persons unknown. Case closed.

Not so fast.

Walter Byron, the special investigator hired by Mesa County District Attorney's office to investigate several unsolved crimes in Grand Junction, including the Big Kid Eames murder, investigated the Beardsley mystery.

Byron concluded that Beardsley had carefully planned and carried out the suicide. Byron surmised Beardsley had drawn blood from himself and planted it in the car, and left one shoe in the car.

Byron also said that Beardsley had held the gun tight against the back of his head and pulled the trigger. Beardsley was despondent because he was in ill health and had money worries.

However, Flora Parkerson said that when her father picked up the hat he said there was no way the gunshot was self inflicted, that it would be near to impossible for Beardsley to hold the gun to the back of his head at that angle and fire it, that someone had shot Beardsley in the back of his head.

You be the judge.