

Sheboygan pathologist helped in Ed Gein case

“You’ve read fantastic fiction of werewolves and such and laughed it off as a figment of your imagination. Well this was too gruesome to even talk about,” so said Sheboygan County Sheriff Ed Kroll to a Sheboygan Press reporter. “It doesn’t seem possible.”

Kroll had just witnessed the horrifying autopsy of Mrs. Bernice Worden, a local sales clerk and Ed Gein’s final victim.

In November of 1957, Edward Theodore Gein was introduced to America after a dreadful discovery at his rural Plainfield farm. Home-grown in Waushara County, Ed Gein, turned out to be one of Wisconsin’s most unusual serial killers.

Though born in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, 110 years ago this August 27th, Ed was raised outside Plainfield, a town of about 650, located 25 miles south of Stevens Point.

Father, George, struggled with alcoholism, and mother, Augusta, known to be a heavy-handed, religious fanatic, raised Ed and brother, Henry, with a dysfunctional set of rules by which to live. It was a life unfit for children. Circumstances did not improve with time.

Gein’s father died in 1940, and then his brother died mysteriously during a fire in 1944. Both were further blows to Ed’s psyche. It is suspected that brother, Henry, may have been Ed’s first victim. Then his mother passed away from health problems in 1945.

Ed held on to the farm, earning money from odd jobs as a handyman. After his mother died, he boarded up rooms used by her, never again entering them. His living space after that was a cluttered, dirty room next to the kitchen.

Obsessively devoted to his mother, Gein began his descent into madness by robbing graves.

Left all alone on the farm, the grave robbing supplied body parts kept as trophies. Even worse he was a necrophiliac and human taxidermist.

Ed Gein finally turned to murder when digging up fresh graves didn’t satiate his weird desires. He killed at least two women. Up to five other missing souls may also have been his victims.

Bernice Worden disappeared on opening day of deer season 1957. With the entire town out hunting, it was quiet when Gein showed up at Worden’s hardware store to buy anti-freeze for his car. He also wanted to buy a new .22 gun. Planning ahead, he came with a .22 shell in his pocket, loaded the gun when it was shown to him by Worden, and then shot her.

When she was discovered missing by her son hours later, a blood trail and a sales slip for anti-freeze were the only clues left. Worden’s son told investigators that Gein had been in the store the evening before, saying he would return the next morning for a gallon of anti-freeze.

It was in the afternoon of that November 16th when police found the defiled body of the missing store clerk, at Gein’s farm. Ed had just finished supper when he was taken into custody.

The search began in the dark as the farm had no electricity. Generators and searchlights were brought in. The horror grew for the police as they searched the house. At times officers left to get air. Some became violently ill because of what they saw inside.

Besides Worden's body, police found a collection of human skulls along with furniture and clothing, including a suit, made from human body parts. Gein told police he had dug up the graves of recently buried women who reminded him of his mother. Investigators found the remains of 10 women in Gein's home, but he was ultimately linked to just two murders: those of Bernice Worden and another local woman, Mary Hogan. On December 8, 1954, 51-year-old Mary Hogan disappeared from the tavern she managed in Pine Grove, Wisconsin. Her remains were also found at the farm.

On November 21, 1957, Gein was arraigned in Waushara County Court, where he pled not guilty by reason of insanity. Found mentally incompetent and unfit for trial, Ed was sent to the Central State Hospital for the Criminally Insane (now the Dodge Correctional Institution), a maximum-security facility in Waupun. He was later transferred to the Mendota State Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin with a diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Nearly ten years later, in 1968, he was declared mentally able and went on trial in November of 1969. The trial lasted for a week and found him unfit. He was sent back to Waupun.

The abandoned Gein farm attracted crowds of curiosity seekers before it burned down in 1958, most likely torched by an arsonist.

Sheboygan's connection comes with Dr. Frederick Eigenberger of Rancho Flores fame. Dr. Eigenberger was the staff pathologist at Sheboygan Memorial Hospital. Well-known for his work with rattlesnake venom and orchids, he also did work for the Wisconsin state crime lab. In this instance, he was called on to assist state authorities in solving the bizarre slaying of Mrs. Bernice Worden.

Eigenberger performed the autopsies on the victims of Ed Gein. Per his own notes, the autopsy of Worden occurred in the embalming room at Ray Goult's funeral home. Gathered around the table that awful November day were Goult, the undertaker, two members of the state crime lab, Sheriff Harold Kroll of Sheboygan and one of his deputies, Robert Frewert, Eigenberger and his wife, Cordelia.

As he worked, he dictated his findings to his wife, a secretary and office manager at the Sheboygan Clinic. She jotted notes on loose leaf paper which were later assembled into an official document typed on Sheboygan Memorial Hospital letterhead.

He also examined Gein that Sunday at the Waushara County Jail, and helped identify the partial remains found at the farm.

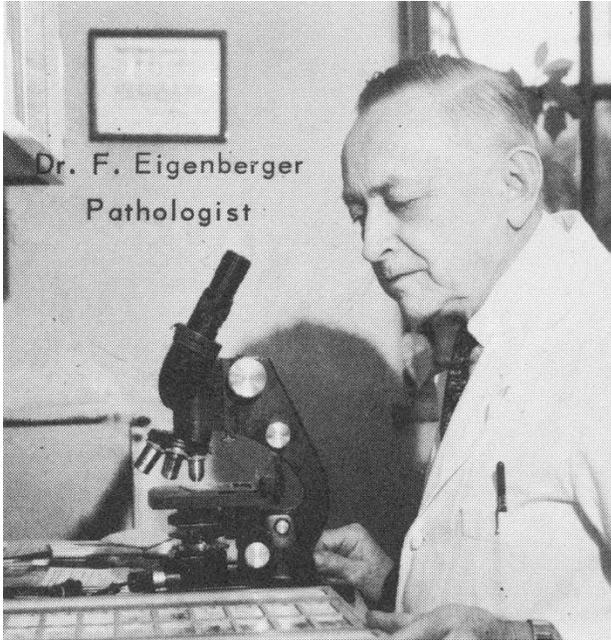
On July 26, 1984, Ed Gein, died of complications from cancer in a Wisconsin prison at age 77. Supposedly, the inspiration for the character Norman Bates in the 1959 novel "Psycho," Gein starred in a real life horror story, one almost too awful to comprehend, a story most in the Plainfield area would just as soon forget.



Ed Gein home, Plainfield, Wisconsin: Site of Ed Gein's Murder House. Ed's house was bulldozed after it burned down in 1957, but people still seek the spot where he practiced his peculiar form of carnage.



Ed Gein's arrest in November 1957.



Dr. Frederick Eigenberger, pathologist from Sheboygan; the man who performed the autopsy on Gein's victims.



The stolen tombstone of Ed Gein has been brought home to Plainfield, WI. In June of 2015 it mysteriously disappeared from Gein's grave in Plainfield Cemetery. It was returned in 2016. Ed lies in an unmarked grave between his parents.