

JULY 13, 1909



It was just a normal Tuesday for Henry Hayes. Another morning for Henry to get up out of bed, put his pants on one leg at a time, eat breakfast, kiss his wife and walk out the door. Just another normal day for Henry to head to work at Burgaw Brick Works. It was just another “new normal” Tuesday for Mary Williams. Another morning for Mary to get out of bed, dress and find a new routine since she and her husband separated just three weeks previous. It however, was not just a normal Tuesday for Walter Williams. It was a morning filled with fear, grief, anger and revenge. It was a morning that Walter knew everything would change for Henry, Mary and himself. In just a few hours, it all would be over.

Mary Williams was a very independent woman. Prior to getting married, Mary had obtained a job up north as a cook. She had goals. She wanted to earn and save her money and bring it back to Burgaw to invest in property. When she returned to Burgaw, she purchased property and a nice home. In 1908, she sold a parcel of land to Burgaw Brick Works for their manufacturing plant. Mary never consulted her husband when it came to her financial affairs. She received her advice from her sister and her sister’s husband, Henry Hayes. Walter always thought he should have been the one she consulted and this created a wedge between Mary and Walter. At the end of June in 1909, Walter and Mary amicably divided their belongings and Walter left. He headed to Georgetown, South Carolina to stay with one of his brothers.

As the hours turned to days and days turned to weeks, the anger in Walter grew. It is unknown if Walter really missed his wife and wanted to be with Mary or if he just really wanted her money, but either way, Walter boarded a train and returned to Burgaw on Sunday July 11, 1909. He begged his wife to take him back, but unfortunately for him, she refused. He tried again Monday, and still she refused. Mary repeatedly went to Henry for protection every time Walter would come begging, and this enraged Walter even more. He would not try again on Tuesday.



No, Tuesday was not a normal day for Walter. That Tuesday was the day that Walter made a decision that would shock Mary's sister and the whole community. That Tuesday morning at 8:30, Walter entered the Pender Hardware Co. store and purchased ten shells loaded with buck shot. He told the clerk that he was going hunting that morning. He also purchased some "sparkling hyso" to settle his nerves and he left the store and headed for Burgaw Brick Works.

As he entered the brick yard, he offered a drink to some of the laborers and continued drinking himself. Jim Bell, another Burgaw Brick Works employee, noticed Walter's condition and attempted to get Walter's gun. Walter fought back and told Jim that he will kill him if he tried to take his gun. Walter focused back on his mission, saw Henry and raised his gun. One of the employees shouted "Hayes lookout" and Henry turned his head just as the shot was fired. Henry died instantly.

Blinded by rage, Walter turned and walked across the railroad to find his wife. Mary saw him coming and turned to run, but she stopped. The reason is unknown, but she stopped and walked back in his direction. Maybe she thought she could talk sense into him or maybe she knew she would not be able to out run him and his gun. Once she got within a few feet of him and he fired. Killing her instantly.

No, this wasn't a normal Tuesday. Walter had a plan. With Henry dead and Mary dead, there was only one other thing to do. He reloaded the shot gun, turned it on himself and fired. The first shot was not a success. He walked about twenty steps, loaded his gun and fired again, this time dropping to the ground. Walter passed away about two hours later.

