



# Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland

*Patricia L. Bryan , Thomas Wolf*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

## Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland

Patricia L. Bryan , Thomas Wolf

**Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland** Patricia L. Bryan , Thomas Wolf

In 1900, Margaret Hossack, the wife of a prominent Iowa farmer, was arrested for bludgeoning her husband to death with an ax while their children slept upstairs. The community was outraged: How could a woman commit such an act of violence? Firsthand accounts describe the victim, John Hossack, as a cruel and unstable man. Perhaps Margaret Hossack was acting out of fear. Or perhaps the story she told was true—that an intruder broke into the house, killed her husband while she slept soundly beside him, and was still on the loose. Newspapers across the country carried the story, and community sentiment was divided over her guilt. At trial, Margaret was convicted of murder, but later was released on appeal. Ultimately, neither her innocence nor her guilt was ever proved.

Patricia Bryan and Thomas Wolf examine the harsh realities of farm life at the turn of the century and look at the plight of women—legally, socially, and politically—during that period. What also emerges is the story of early feminist Susan Glaspell, who covered the Hossack case as a young reporter and later used it as the basis for her acclaimed work *A Jury of Her Peers*.

*Midnight Assassin* expertly renders the American character and experience: our obsession with crime, how justice is achieved, and the powerful influence of the media.

### Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland Details

Date : Published April 1st 2005 by Algonquin Books

ISBN : 9781565123069

Author : Patricia L. Bryan , Thomas Wolf

Format : Hardcover 278 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Crime, True Crime, History, Mystery

 [Download Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartla ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland Patricia L. Bryan , Thomas Wolf**

---

## From Reader Review Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland for online ebook

### Heidi says

Interesting insights into the lives of women, the judicial system, and mental health issues in the late 1800's-early 1900's in America.

---

### BarbJ says

When you consider this actually happened, it's a good story. It is fascinating (and frustrating) how much the attorney for each side got away with. But the theme of the book is more about how little most men thought of women - the first verdict was based so much on the defendant's looks - how big she was, how unremorseful she seemed to be. And based upon her husband's standing the community. It drags a little at times, but is a fast read. Shows how far women have come in the past 100 years with regards to respect.

---

### Steve says

An interesting book about a serial killer in Austin, Texas in 1884 & 1885, about a year before the Whitechapel Murders. The author details the servant girl murders that started with black servants struck with axes. Then a couple of white women were killed as well. The author ends up being unable to identify the killer or even offering a strong hypothesis. One option is James Maybrick a London cotton merchant who "may have" traveled to Austin while at the Southern Exhibition in New Orleans. Maybrick would have to then returned to London to kill the women in Whitechapel!

This was a library book and within it, I found a receipt for about \$575 from the circuit court. Not sure if I would want to be reminded of my fine everytime I used my bookmark!

---

### Jo Anne says

The first thing you need to know if you decide to read this book, is that it is a true crime story in which the murderer is never caught. There is plenty of speculation, though.

In a small farming community in Iowa, in December of 1900, farmer John Hossack was murdered in his bed with two blows from his own ax. His wife Margaret slept beside him, never hearing a thing. Or so she claimed.

Hossack, a successful farmer and well-liked by his neighbors, was not so well-liked by his wife and 9 children. He was abusive to both his family and his farm animals. Margaret often ran to the neighbors to complain about him. His eldest son left home as soon as he could.

The night Hossack was murdered, the family dog, a constant barker, was silent. He was also lethargic, leading to claims he had been drugged. (There is an hysterical bit in the middle of the book in which one of the prosecuting lawyers reasons that the dog wasn't drugged, he was heartbroken and stunned over his Master's death.)

This being 1900, there was no CSI or crime experts, and any clues were of course destroyed by neighbors,

friends, family and police tramping through evidence. Eventually Margaret Hossack was arrested and put on trial.

She lied about her husband's abusive ways. Her children lied. Some of the neighbors lied, some told the truth and one neighbor had a nervous breakdown before he had to testify and was committed. People wondered if HE was the murderer.

All in all, a very well researched and written true story. Near the end of the book there is speculation about who really killed John Hossack so arm chair detectives will have a chance to ponder the truth.

---

### **Wanda says**

1900 - Iowa - a gruesome murder of an Iowa farmer takes place - a crime that would never be solved. John Hossack's murder was described as being one of the most awful things to ever happen in the state of Iowa. This was a tragic case, not only for the victim and the accused, but also for the family.

There was a long history of conflict in the Hossack family, with numerous family quarrels. John Hossack was unpredictable and prone to bursts of rage. He was a man filled with deep anger and his bad temper could be easily triggered, especially by his wife. But he was remembered in the community as an honorable man and a good farmer.

Margaret Hossack was not popular in the neighborhood. She was a woman who did not make friends easily. It was a case built on circumstantial evidence. Her children surrounded her with loving support, not believing that their mother was capable of this violent murder. She seemed to be a typical farmwife, and committing such a violent crime seemed to be out of character for her.

What really happened that night? Who was the Midnight Assassin? Was Margaret Hossack's story of an unknown intruder plausible?

The *Midnight Assassin* is sad, disturbing, and eerie, but very slow paced. Most of the book was informative, but was not a real page turner, not having a good flow. I was tempted at times to put it to the side. On a positive note, the authors did their homework on research, and were able to weave together some interesting facts that were quite relevant to this horrible crime. There was some interesting insight on what it must've been like as a woman back in the early 1900's.

My rating is 3 stars - just lukewarm.

---

### **Queenmanis13 says**

I decided recently to try out non fiction and this was my first go at it...I liked the book. I like that the story was real and included many different people's perspectives. I still am torn on who I believe actually committed the murder... Not a dry read, which I appreciate and was concerned with since it is non fiction.

---

### **David says**

A celebrated case in its day, the 1900 murder of Iowa farmer John Hassock inspired two well-known works

by writer Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): her play *Trifles* (1916) and her short story "A Jury of Peers" (1917). This account of the Hassock case—first published in hardback by Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill and since reprinted in paperback by the University of Iowa Press—is true crime of unusual substance. Authors Patricia L. Bryan and Thomas Wolf take pains to tell not only of an axe murder and courtroom drama but also of the hard and lonely life of a turn-of-the-century farmer's wife who may have feared for the safety of her family and who may have killed her husband. Highly recommended.

First reading: 13 March 2011

Second reading: 31 January 2012

Third reading: 10 September 2017

---

### **Douglas Cosby says**

3.5 stars -- Very fun read, especially for an Austinite. Writing is only so-so, and there isn't any new closer or really even any new ideas, but it was really cool hearing about the logistics of the murders and picturing a burgeoning, old west version of Austin. In particular, the lunatic asylum, which sits just north of downtown on the grounds of the current Austin State Hospital, probably deserves an entire book of its own. Likewise, the spectacle of the state capital construction and how it loomed over downtown creates a great visual that could be expanded on (and probably has been in other books). I ate this book like candy, but it is probably a little more nutritious than I am giving it credit for.

---

### **Naomi says**

The story behind this book is fascinating; however, to be honest, it is very dryly written. It is matter of fact, which normally I enjoy in books. This story made me feel like I was reading a "case study" of the event versus a book published for the general public. Again, very interesting book, but I thought it called for some more "descriptive, uplifting" writing.

---

### **Shelley says**

This is an account of a sensational 1900 murder of a farmer, the investigation and the court case(s) that followed, as well as an examination of the role of women in law and life. The juxtaposition of a woman journalist who covered the first trial (who would later use the case as fodder for a short story and a play) with the severely circumscribed life of a farm wife, accused of the murder of her husband, is a nice touch.

The gift here is that it's easy enough to follow along with the court proceedings if you're a lay person, but as an attorney, it's really fascinating to look at the trial as a point in time when our rules of evidence were still evolving. It looks like a modern capital case in so many ways, especially since the issues that get raised today, like chain of custody and foundation of evidence, are the same -- but are handled differently. This would be a great book to read before taking Evidence in law school, because it brings home all the reasons why we need those rules.

And -- this is something I never thought I'd write, because who would? -- props to the Supreme Court of Iowa circa 1901 for being so damned progressive.

## Jessica says

Interesting story. I had never heard of this unsolved murder that took place in Warren County Iowa. I'm still not sure which side I would have taken if on a jury.

---

## Shari Larsen says

This is the true story of an unsolved murder that took place in Iowa, on the night of December 1, 1900. John Hossack, a well to-do farmer, was fatally attacked with an ax while he slept. Suspicions focused on his long suffering wife, Margaret, who claimed to asleep beside her husband in the bed while the attack took place. A history of domestic strife within the household convinced local authorities that she had finally snapped after years of threats and verbal abuse. This story takes us through her two trials, and alternate theories as to who else could have been responsible for the crime.

It also brings to light how at that time, communities largely ignored or tolerated domestic abuse. There was a "code of silence" among the neighbors, any possible abuse was a deemed a "private matter" and not to be spoken about outside of the family, especially in rural areas, where women in particular often lived isolated lives, miles away from the nearest neighbor and rarely having contact with anyone outside the immediate family. The book also delves into what daily life was like for a rural farm woman at that time, it's not hard to understand why some of them would "snap."

This was a well written book, but I wish some of the theories about other possible suspects, especially the sons in the family, would have been fleshed out more.

---

## Sara says

I don't typically read "true crime", I prefer mystery novels, but I was pleasantly surprised by this book. This true unsolved mystery and all the events surrounding it had me trying to solve it, and I loved coming up with my own theories about what actually happened. While I will never know what really happened, like who the real murderer was, I still really enjoyed this book. Bryan's writing style was easy to read and not boring or dry at all. It read more like a narrative than a history or biography. The author laid out all the facts for the readers to make their own judgments, and didn't force her own interpretations on me, which I appreciated. With the facts at hand, I have a good idea who the murderer was. I am satisfied, which is surprising, because I usually don't go for "open-ended", ambiguous endings. I like a resolution. But the fact that there was no clear resolution and I still enjoyed it is evidence of what a well-written book this is.

---

## ABC says

Interesting snapshot of turn of the century Iowa and the lives of farmer's wives. Some good feminist discussions about how much it sucked for farmer's wives and, hell, women in general who were married young, bred a bunch of children, worked just as hard as their husbands maintaining the home and raising the kids and getting no recognition for it.

Doesn't answer the question of who killed John Hossack, but I enjoyed the journey.

---

## **Rohan Patel says**

I recently read this book as a mystery that my mom recommended. I thought it would be the classic, over-dramatized murder mystery book before I started it.

I must say that it is easily the best mystery book I have ever read. This book is based on a true story which makes it even more interesting.

The book takes place in Warren County, Iowa in 1900. Margaret Hossack (John Hossack's wife) is accused of murdering her husband with an ax. The evidence seems all against her, she claimed not to be awakened by her husband's death as they slept together. She says that she suspected an intruder was in her house but instead of waking her husband who slept with a loaded rifle, she woke her children. Above all, she showed no emotion at her arrest.

This book takes you back through Margaret Hossack's life after her husband's death, the events of her trial and the final verdict.

What I found special about this book is it actually flip-flops between Margaret Hossack's life in the past and the two authors trying to find out information about what happened in the present.

Once again if you need a mystery book I recommend Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland to you.

---