



# Terror in Ypsilanti: John Norman Collins Unmasked

*Gregory A. Fournier*

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## **Terror in Ypsilanti: John Norman Collins Unmasked** Gregory A. Fournier

Between the summers of 1967 through 1969, before the term serial killer was coined, a predatory killer stalked the campuses of Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan seeking prey until he made the arrogant mistake of killing his last victim in the basement of his uncle's home. All-American boy John Norman Collins was arrested, tried, and convicted of the strangulation murder of Karen Sue Beineman. The other murders attributed to Collins never went to trial, with one exception, and soon became cold cases. With the benefit of fifty years of hindsight, hundreds of vintage newspaper articles, thousands of police reports, and countless interviews, *Terror in Ypsilanti: John Norman Collins Unmasked* tells the stories of the other victims, recreates the infamous trial that took Collins off the streets, and details Collins' time spent in prison. *Terror in Ypsilanti* compiles an array of physical and circumstantial evidence drawing an unmistakable portrait of the sadistic murderer who slaughtered these innocent young women.

## **Terror in Ypsilanti: John Norman Collins Unmasked Details**

Date : Published August 1st 2016 by Wheatmark

ISBN : 9781627874038

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Format : Paperback 516 pages

Genre : Crime, True Crime, Nonfiction, History

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## From Reader Review Terror in Ypsilanti: John Norman Collins Unmasked for online ebook

### Shirley says

Update 7/2017:

I would give this book no stars if I could. I read this book last summer when it came out and as you can see from the review below, I already had qualms, but was willing to give it the benefit of the doubt. If I had attended a reading then as I did now, I would not have purchased this book. The author is so far enthralled by Sheriff Harvey that this is more fictionalized than The Michigan Murders. At least Keyes is open about some aspects being modified. This author on the other hand claims no one could possibly write a better version than him, and that Keyes was a plagiarist who missed things, and that everyone connected to the case is oh so thankful to him for setting the record straight, finally. Well that is nonsense, this is utter revisionist history meant to glorify Harvey.

The author claimed during a reading that Harvey was 'this close' to arresting Collins before MSP came in and took the credit. Well if that is true why didn't Harvey reveal this while other women were being killed? If Harvey was so close to arresting Collins, why did he let him go after questioning him?

The author also disparaged the press characterization at the time of Harvey being a Keystone Cop. It was fair! The mannequin stake out debacle can be laid directly at the feet of Harvey. He came in like a storm trooper and scared Collins off without being captured. The entire book is meant to glorify Harvey at the expense of the rest of the people involved.

My previous review noted the way a State Trooper's testimony was portrayed as not knowing anything and in fact that man did much of the evidence collection and detailed the procedures at length. Seeing Mr Fournier glorify Harvey now gives lie to my benefit of the doubt. This isn't cut for narrative reasons, but to make sure the MSP look inept. The author noted with pride that Harvey was a beta reader and that after that he cut nearly a third of the book. Hmm... I wonder if the complimentary to MSP was on the chopping block after that editing.

It appears Harvey sold the author a one sided inaccurate story and all the authors alleged research didn't contradict it. He definitely was not a team player and wanted all the glory at the expense of the victims and this author let him continue that destructive behavior 50 years later. The Michigan State Police were true team players with other police departments, medical personnel, prosecutors office, etc. and the arrest of Jon Norman Collins came about after numerous hours of diligent police work.

It may be harder to follow with the name changes, but in overall accuracy go read Michigan Murders by Edward Keyes. Much more truth is found in that fiction than in this glorification of an ego driven bungler.

Original review 10/2016:

At times this book seemed unfair to the police to my reading, but after I finished I realize that this may be a case of my knowing things about the trial that are either boring or unavailable in the archives. For instance, one state trooper from the crime lab is shown testifying only I didn't do that test or I cant say that is not my job. In fact, he did much of the evidence collection and I can see that relaying how he found one piece or another would not serve the narrative. It was for the most part well researched, but lacking in some structure to the narrative. I never could figure out what the author set out to do, the introduction seems to suggest Collins didn't do it, but the author's blog is clear that he believes that Collins killed these women. This confusion in purpose added to a somewhat jumpy timeline in the first part plus some missing information

about the investigation makes it a bit difficult to read. In general a good read

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### **Ronnie Cramer says**

A straight-forward and detailed (if sometimes long-winded) account of crimes attributed to a suspected Canadian-born serial killer. I enjoyed reading the book, though I occasionally hit patches that made me wonder if I was always getting the straight dope. For example, the author offhandedly and without equivocation refers to Jack Ruby's slaying of Lee Harvey Oswald as a 'mob hit,' and makes mention of 'the Dr. Sam Shepard case in Texas' (presumably he means the Dr. Sam SHEPPARD case in OHIO), etc.

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### **Suzy says**

I am from Ypsilanti and was a 19 year old college student the summer John Norman Collins was arrested, so I was very interested in reading this account. The author did a great job of documenting the facts and events. If you weren't from the area and familiar with the people and places mentioned, you might have felt the writing was a little dry. But because I lived through that time and could visualize many of the scenes described, it was fascinating reading for me.

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### **A Wall says**

Fascinating read! Being familiar with the area, I found it just as fascinating to hear tales from people in the area and their recollections of those years

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### **Amy says**

There is some interesting information here, but this book is not well-written. For starters, the beginning reads like a watered-down rehashing of Edward Keyes' "The Michigan Murders". There are strange conjectures reflecting Fournier's opinions as well as attempts at editorial flourishes ("Loretta Collins was guilty in the first degree of blind love for her son") sprinkled throughout the text, and he makes some odd narrative choices involving the timeline. There's also an exhaustive section listing every single contraband item Collins was apparently ever found with in prison. However, it did flesh out both the Roxie Phillips and Jane Mixer cases more than I've seen in previous texts. Overall, I'm not sure this is worth the read for anyone other than locals (like me) or serial-killer buffs, and maybe not even then.

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### **Paula Margulies says**

Terror in Ypsilanti is a fabulous book. The story is fascinating, especially for someone like me, who was on the West coast during the time the murders happened, so I hadn't heard much about them. Gregory A. Fournier has done a terrific job documenting the details of the murders and the subsequent trial and incarceration of John Norman Collins. The writing is clear and straight-forward, with many relevant bits of information that the author uncovered after years of research woven into the narrative. I found the cold-

blooded arrogance of Collins to be both repulsive and gripping - this is a book that is difficult to put down once you start reading.

The book includes a map of the drop sites for the Washtenaw County murders and a collection of photographs of the victims, Collins, his parents, and the prosecutors, attorneys, and sheriffs (along with the Dutch psychic), who were all a part of this chilling episode in Michigan state history. I found the three appendices (a breakdown of the time line, a directory of places mentioned in the book, and a list of all of the people who appear in the book) to be especially helpful. There's also a comprehensive index. This author did his homework, and it shows. Highly recommended.

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### **Bonnie Kernene says**

What an excellent book! This book talks about the serial murders committed by John Norman Collins (Chapman). It is very detailed, about the victims and the killer. It gave the story of the girls who were murdered by Collins and their hopes for a future. The girls were students at the University, looking forward to their futures, hopes and dreams. Then there is the killer, John Norman Collins, also a college student. There was nothing really special about him, nothing that stuck out. He seemed to be a "normal" student. He rarely showed any ambition, or anger issues. He was very charming and charismatic. That is what made it all so easy. This book was well-written, well researched and easy to read. I had previously read the other book on this case, but this one is far superior, in my opinion. It even has really nice photos of the victims, including Roxie Phillips in California. Read this book! You will not regret it.

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### **Cindy Koch-Krol says**

John Norman Collins is some piece of work. I totally understand why this author, Mr. Fournier, could not go into his childhood or his psych profile because there is nothing conclusive in Collins' history. His childhood is sketchy and the information about it is unreliable. He seems on the surface to have a good loving relationship with his mother and sister. He has always professed his innocence and claimed to not know any of the murdered girls even in the face of eyewitnesses who put him with them. He's an enigma. Any book written about him will be less than completely satisfying because we don't have that FBI profiler's certainty on WHY! The Big capital lettered WHY? WHY did he do it? What was his trigger? What was that thing that happened to him that sent him over the edge into killing, maiming, and mutilating young girls? He has always refused to be psychoanalyzed. He doesn't speak to people and he seems to have compartmentalized his crimes to the vast degree of denying they even happened. Anyone who pays attention to the facts of this case can have no doubt that he is the killer. But even he believes he is not guilty.

He committed his serial murders before the term Serial Killer was even invented. But still, I want to know what the FBI Profilers would have said about him, had they been able to be on this case. They would have identified his psychology and pinpointed his trigger. But I so want to know why. I know, I know . . . Get used to disappointment!

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### **Fishface says**

This was a great read on an endlessly fascinating case. Well-written and blessedly free of typos; full of things I never knew before about this chain of murders. Maddeningly, the blurb on the back of the book says the

author was a neighbor of the killer's and had some "unpleasant brushes" with him, but there's not a word about any of that inside.

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## **Nan Asher says**

For those who remember when this happened, and for those who want to know more about it, evil does exist . . . This is as much an Ann Arbor / Washtenaw County book as it is Ypsi.

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## **Argum says**

Update 7/12/17: I have deducted two stars from my rating of this book after attending a reading by the author. A previous 4 star review where I gave benefit of the doubt to author given access to materials, modern perspective etc is no longer necessary. The author clearly had a particular perspective which shouldn't be ignored.

On reading the book I noted that perhaps it was my modern knowledge of crime scene and maybe trials from tv that made this seem strange. I also assumed there was an access problem to records or people. That from his own mouth is partially true. But the biggest problem is that the author is in fact not unbiased, but instead heavily influenced by the County Sheriff Doug Harvey. That would be fine (maybe), the man is still alive and cooperative (he was at the reading), but this is done at not only the exclusion but the expense of the Michigan State Police.

The author claims the MSP were forced upon the local agencies when Sherriff Harvey was 'this close' to catching Collins and that he had him under surveillance. Not only is this not true its ridiculous. MSP presence was requested by Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti PD because of Harvey's incompetence. But aside from that, if Harvey was so close and knew who did it, why did he one let Collins go after the incident where he relayed details of the case and why did he not reveal this identity to anyone. The author actually made it seem that MSP was called in one morning and that very afternoon arrested the man and took the credit away from the ones who did all the work. That is patently false. The MSP were involved for a lengthy period of time.

This also explains why the author is light on details of the arrest. He is fuzzy in book and didn't 'remember' at the reading. It was at the State Police Lab! The Michigan Murders does a fine job telling this story so it is publicly available if you aren't trying to hatchet job the MSP. (Source: I personally know someone in the room that day, Keyes has it exactly as it occurred)

Another attendee asked him about the MSP uncle of Collins and whether he had cooperated. She phrased it as the trooper uncle who turned him in. The author said he had never spoken to him but maybe he would try while up north this week. Neatly ignoring the role the once again ignored MSP played. How can this huge player be ignored? Easy he is a State Trooper.

So while some claim this is a hack job framing up Collins - it's not, but it is a glorification of Sheriff Harvey at the expense of the MSP. Just read the acknowledgements one State Trooper by brief name but a glowing thank you to Harvey. This is translated in the narrative framing.

Go read the Michigan Murders and supplement with some newspaper accounts of the time to get the names straight.

Original review:

I enjoyed this book more than the Michigan Murders, but it is not must read. The introduction sets you up for maybe John Norman Collins isn't guilty of anything but a frame up, but the text isn't aiming to discredit anyone. I grew up knowing about these murders and live in the area, but am not old enough to have been around then. Reading about hair samples and blood without DNA is strange, but some of the court procedures appear to have changed as well like defense access to evidence. Some framing of these changes would have been helpful because I don't think the point was to make it seem like shoddy work, but you are sort of left with that impression when the now seemingly archaic mistakes happen - radios in the rain seems like a bad joke not a real thing sitting here in 2016. I am left in no doubt that Collins is guilty of at a minimum Karen Beinneman and the California case. Not sure if it was because that is how it was back then too but I am less sure about the other girls and feel bad for their families all these years later. There is both too much and too little detail in this book. It is partially disorganized in structure as well. Worth reading for those already interested but not sure if a first time Coed Killer or Michigan Murder would do well with this book.

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## Me says

I devoured this book in less than 2 days. Extensively researched, this book is an up to date analysis of a serial killer from the late 1960's. I thought the inclusion of Collins' prison disciplinary records was interesting and proves beyond a doubt that he is still manipulative and would be a danger to society if released.

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## Nancy says

Fasincating book. I read the fictionalized "Michigan Murders" back in the day, and am really glad someone put all of the murder/trial information together in a nonfiction format. I was shocked to learn John Norman Collins actually terrorized a female co-worker by giving gruesome descriptions of one of the murdered girls. It amazes me he got away with this. I understand it had a lot to do with his uncle being a state trooper, but my mind has gone back many times to that tidbit the author included. I would have liked the author to expand on that more. Didn't this cruel behavior of harrassing a female co-worker raise a red flag to any of the detectives, at least enough to follow up and keep an eye on this guy? I feel sorry for the families whose daughters were so brutally murdered. It's very sad, indeed. I've watched video of the killer speaking from prison (on youtube). His claims of being innocent are a joke, and I'm so glad he will never be let out of prison.

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## Sara says

I went to college in Ypsi and lived there for 10 years, so was surprised to find that iconic water tower on the local author shelf at my library in San Diego. The book was interesting and I devoured it quickly, but I had to give it fewer stars because the writing wasn't great. Definitely great for people who are interesting in the Michigan Murders, and want an in-depth look.

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## barbara stanisz says

An excellent read. I was a sophomore in high school during this time and remember being repeatedly cautioned about being approached by a stranger. I had two close friends that ultimately graduated from EMU while I chose MSU. I think back on the risks that I took back then and think that I was way too overconfident. I thank god that my own two daughters are much more sensible! This book was well written, easy to read, and well researched. It is just too bad that the public has had to support this killer for over 50 years. My thoughts and prayers go out to the families of the victims.

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