

THE SUN

Two executives' killings stunned rail offices Deaths: 1930 tragedy, amid Depression, shook Western Maryland Railway.

Early in the afternoon of Sept. 23, 1930, Patrolman Walter P. Kohler was standing at Calvert and Franklin streets when suddenly he heard a volley of shots coming from a fifth-floor office in the Standard Oil Building at 501 St. Paul St.

Racing into the building, past stunned office workers, the policeman broke into the office of Maxwell C. Byers, 52, president of the Western Maryland Railway, and made a startling discovery.

Byers had been shot to death and was lying on his back near the door with his hands flung over his head. About 10 feet away, still clinging to life, was Dudley G. Gray, 61, Western Maryland Railway traffic vice president. Beside him sat two .32-caliber automatic pistols.

Charles Belt, a railroad executive who had followed the policeman into the office, was the first to reach Gray's side.

He asked who was responsible for the shooting.

Gray replied in a fading voice: "That's obvious."

Sirens attract crowds

As word of the shooting spread through the city, crowds of the curious gathered outside the Standard Oil Building, drawn by the ambulances and police cars that had raced to the scene with screaming sirens.

Detectives standing in Byers' office began their investigation. "They found the rug in the well-appointed office stained with a widening pool of blood," reported the Evening Sun.

Ambulances carried Byers to nearby Mercy Hospital. He had been shot eight times. One of the bullets had struck him in the chest and pierced his heart.

"Mr. Gray had been shot twice in the left chest, one of the bullets passing so dangerously close to his heart that the hospital surgeons said his wound

would probably be fatal," said the Evening Sun. "He was semi-conscious, and a priest administered the last rites of the Catholic Church to him as hospital attendants wheeled him along a corridor into an operating room."

Gray's condition was "so grave that hospital surgeons could not remove his clothes to probe for the bullets in his chest," said the newspaper. He died five hours later.

"The affair created a sense of intense excitement and confusion in practically all the offices of the Standard Oil Building, and in most offices there work was suspended until the excitement subsided. When it was at its height it was practically impossible for outsiders to reach the railroad offices by telephone," said the Evening Sun.

The evidence, police said, suggested that Byers had put up a "desperate fight for his life."

Janet M. Byers, wife of the murdered railroad executive, was aboard a streetcar when she heard newsboys peddling extras about the shooting.

"Alighting from the car, Mrs. Byers purchased a paper and, hiring a taxicab, hurried to the Calvert Street institution. She collapsed when she reached the hospital and was placed in a physician's car," reported The Sun.

Both worked for B&O

Byers, one of the country's youngest railroad executives when named head of the Western Maryland in 1918, had known Gray when both worked for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Gray came to Baltimore in 1914 to work for the Western Maryland Railway.

In the wake of the shooting, headlines in The Sun raised the question on everyone's mind: "MOTIVE REMAINS HIDDEN AS GRAY DIES WITHOUT THROWING LIGHT ON ACT. Two Had No Serious Differences, Despite Disputes Over Railway Policies, Say Executives -- No Witnesses to Tragedy."

The police investigation revealed that friction between the two men arose after Gray's department had been criticized by Byers.

"But as far as is known, there was nothing personal in the matter, the private relations of the two men having been more or less cordial," said The Sun.

Clifford C. Bruck, who retired in 1977 as vice president of sales and marketing from the railroad, recalled the other day that when he went to work there in 1939, the murder was still fresh in the memories of railroad employees and a topic of conversation.

"They said that Dudley Gray was hounded constantly by Byers to get more business for the railroad, and this coincided with the start of the Great Depression when all businesses were beginning to feel the effects of it," said Bruck from his Guilford residence.

"He was goaded and prodded to the point that he couldn't take it anymore, so he went up to Byers' office and shot him."

Otto Reinhardt, who was acting coroner of the Central Police District, said he had not been able to find a motive for the slaying.

"In my own opinion, after questioning Mrs. Gray, officials and employees of the company and others, the truth of the shooting will never be known. On the face of it, I believe, Mr. Gray was unbalanced mentally, but what brought that condition about is something else and will remain a mystery. I have given my verdict that Mr. Gray murdered Mr. Byers and then committed suicide, and the case is closed," Reinhardt told The Sun.

"As soon as Coroner Reinhardt had notified the Central Police Station of his official verdict, the case was closed from a police standpoint by a formal entry of murder charges against Mr. Gray on the docket of the Central district," reported the Evening Sun.

Funeral train

A B&O train carrying Byers' body back to Point Pleasant, W. Va., for services departed from Camden Station with a large party of mourners. Aboard the train were such figures from the world of railroading, finance and politics as Lenor F. Loree, president of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad; George M. Shriver, B&O vice president; John M. Dennis, president of the Union Trust Co.; and James H. Preston, former mayor of Baltimore.

Gray's body left Baltimore several hours later aboard a car of the Pennsylvania Railroad for burial in Columbus, Ohio.

An editorial in The Sun headlined "A Tragic Ending" said, "Little need be said, for the unaccountable conflict of personality, the sudden flaring of what must have been an insanity, defy snap judgment and glib analysis.

"One does better to join in Pope's supplication: 'Teach me to feel another's woe, to hide the fault I see.' "

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