A MURDER MYSTERY PUZZLE BOOK FOR ADULTS

COLD CASE DETECTIVE

40 Cases to Solve from the Evidence, Alibis and Clues, and One Cold Case That Waited 28 Years



Helen Corrigan

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Cold Case Detective

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This is a work of fiction. The town of Millbrook, New York, as it appears in these pages is invented, and so are its people, streets, businesses and crimes. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is coincidental.

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First edition, 2026.

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOX

Forty Files

Millbrook, New York. October 2026.

Tomorrow I turn in my badge. Twenty-eight years with the Millbrook Police Department: rookie in 1998, lieutenant today. Clearing out the basement, I found the box I swore I would never throw away. Forty case files. Every one of them taught me something. Thirty-nine of these files closed. One stayed open for twenty-eight years, and it is the last one in the box. Work them in order. By the time you reach it, you will know everything Ada taught me, and you will need all of it.

Most of it, Sergeant Ada Kowalski taught me first. She trained me my first two years. On her notes I was "Rookie," until the day she decided I wasn't. She made me repeat one rule until I said it in my sleep. You'll find it stuck to my first file. Ada trusted clocks, paper, maps, and the small things people forget to lie about.

I have written up each case the way it reached my desk, with the papers that were in the file: statements, receipts, tickets, sketches, the odd newspaper clipping. I kept my notes short and left out the endings. You have everything I had. Some of it you will see faster than I did.

When I got stuck, Ada never gave me the answer. She left me a note, then another. Even after she retired, she read every file I brought to her kitchen table and sent it back with a card. Her notes are at the back, in order, and so is the way each case closed.

Take your time. Millbrook isn't going anywhere.

Sam Novak
Lieutenant, Millbrook Police Department

PERSONNEL FILES

The two names on the box

PERSONNEL FILE · KOWALSKI, ADA — **MILLBROOK P.D.**



ID PHOTO, 1998

RANK
Sergeant

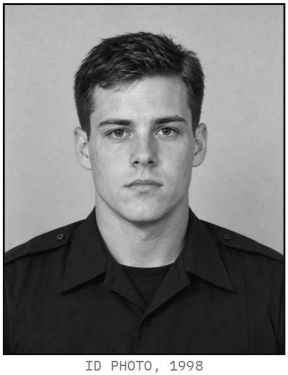
SERVED
1976 to 2016

BADGE
214

TRAINED
Officer S. Novak, 1998 to 2000

Never gave me an answer. Left me a card, then another. Still reads every file I bring to her kitchen table.

PERSONNEL FILE · NOVAK, SAM — **MILLBROOK P.D.**



ID PHOTO, 1998

RANK
Lieutenant

SERVED
1998 to 2026

BADGE
377

CAREER
Officer 1998. Detective 2005. Sergeant 2011. Lieutenant 2018.

Ada's "Rookie" for two years. Retires this Friday. Left the forty files to you.

1998 TO 2026

Twenty-eight years, forty files

OFFICER 1998 to 2005

- **01** 1998 The Last Train at Millbrook
- ▶ *October 1998: Ray Teller drowns*
- **02** 1999 First Prize, Last Slice
- **03** 1999 The Honey Stall
- **04** 2000 Gutter Ball
- **05** 2000 Overdue
- **06** 2000 Class of '80
- **07** 2000 The Tape Doesn't Lie
- **08** 2001 Close Shave
- **09** 2001 Passed to the Left
- **10** 2002 Mirror, Mirror
- **11** 2002 Prepaid
- **12** 2003 One at a Time
- **13** 2003 Short Count
- **14** 2004 Last Words
- **15** 2004 Fresh Powder
- **16** 2005 The Lineup
- **17** 2005 Word Mode

DETECTIVE 2005 to 2011

- **18** 2006 Badge 112
- **19** 2006 Long Shadows
- **20** 2007 Strip-Cut
- **21** 2007 Closed Road
- **22** 2008 The Background
- **23** 2009 Four Keys
- **24** 2010 Line of Sight
- **25** 2011 Nobody's Name

SERGEANT 2011 to 2018

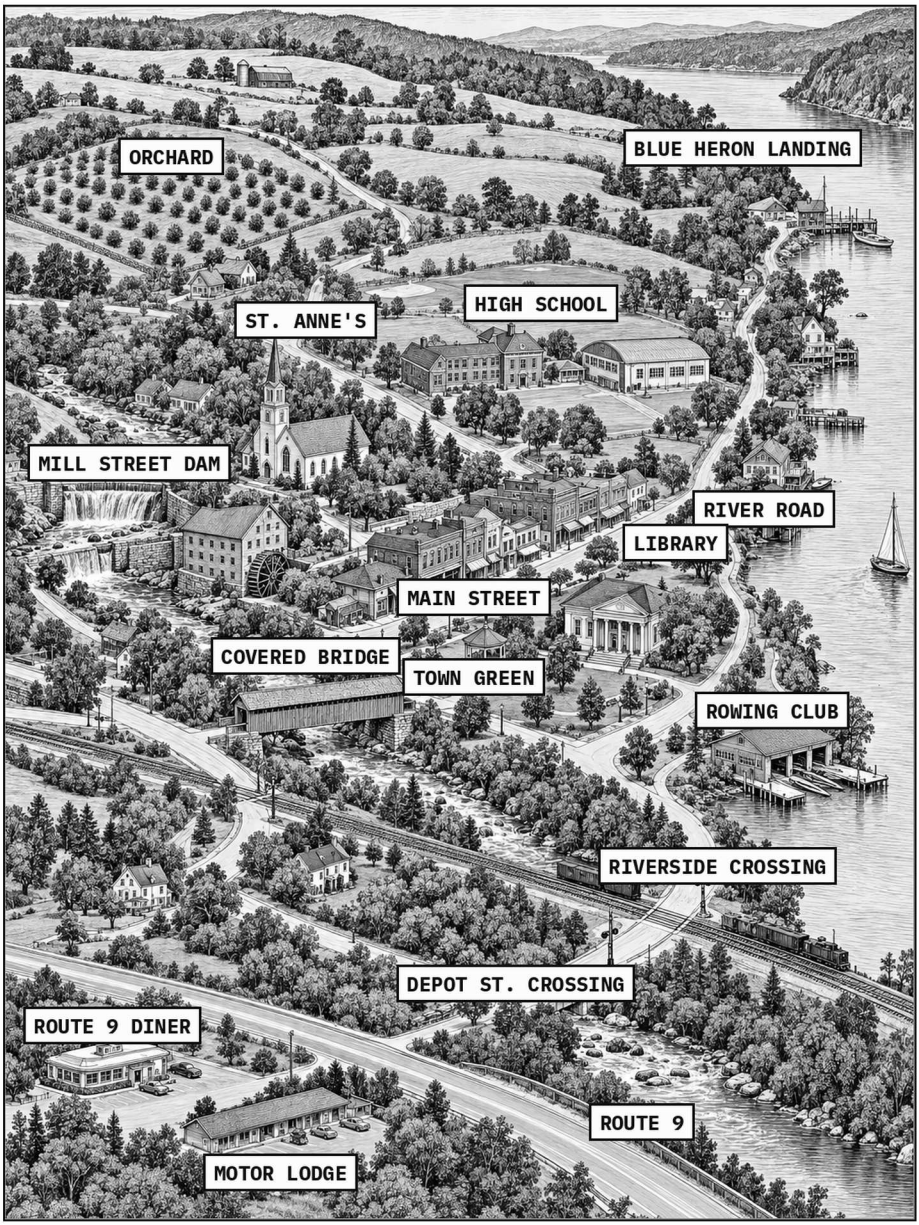
- **26** 2011 The Ladder
- **27** 2012 Black Horse
- **28** 2013 Two by Two
- **29** 2014 Burning Down
- **30** 2015 The Cake Knife
- **31** 2016 The Other Side of the Door
- ▶ *October 2016: Ada retires*
- **32** 2017 In the Dark

LIEUTENANT 2018 to 2026

- **33** 2018 Our Window
- **34** 2019 Half Seven
- **35** 2020 Sunday Call
- **36** 2021 Step Challenge
- **37** 2022 Steno
- **38** 2023 Hours to Days
- **39** 2025 Same Angle
- **40** 2026 Blue Heron

THE TOWN

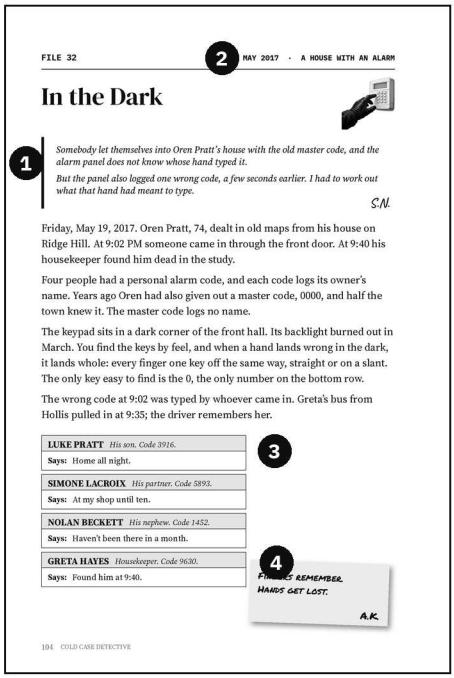
Millbrook, New York



Not to scale. Drawn from the files.

BEFORE YOU START

How a file works



FILE 32 · 2 · MAY 2017 · A HOUSE WITH AN ALARM

In the Dark

1 *Somebody let themselves into Oren Pratt's house with the old master code, and the alarm panel does not know whose hand typed it.*

But the panel also logged one wrong code, a few seconds earlier. I had to work out what that hand had meant to type.

S.N.

Friday, May 19, 2017. Oren Pratt, 74, dealt in old maps from his house on Ridge Hill. At 9:02 PM someone came in through the front door. At 9:40 his housekeeper found him dead in the study.

Four people had a personal alarm code, and each code logs its owner's name. Years ago Oren had also given out a master code, 0000, and half the town knew it. The master code logs no name.

The keypad sits in a dark corner of the front hall. Its backlight burned out in March. You find the keys by feel, and when a hand lands wrong in the dark, it lands whole: every finger one key off the same way, straight or on a slant. The only key easy to find is the 0, the only number on the bottom row.

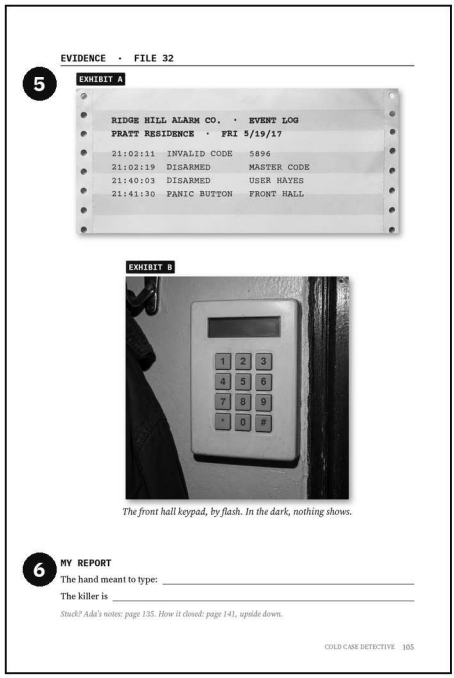
The wrong code at 9:02 was typed by whoever came in. Greta's bus from Hollis pulled in at 9:35; the driver remembers her.

3

LUKE PRATT *His son. Code 3916.*	
Says: Home all night.	
SIMONE LACROIX *His partner. Code 5893.*	
Says: At my shop until ten.	
NOLAN BECKETT *His nephew. Code 1452.*	
Says: Haven't been there in a month.	
GRETA HAYES *Housekeeper. Code 9630.*	
Says: Found him at 9:40.	

4 FACTS REMEMBER. HANDS GET LOST. A.K.

104 COLD CASE DETECTIVE



5 EVIDENCE · FILE 32

EXHIBIT A

RIDGE HILL ALARM CO. · EVENT LOG
PRATT RESIDENCE · FRI 5/19/17

21:02:11	INVALID CODE	5896
21:02:19	DISARMED	MASTER CODE
21:40:03	DISARMED	USER HAYES
21:41:30	PANIC BUTTON	FRONT HALL

EXHIBIT B

The front hall keypad, by flash. In the dark, nothing shows.

6 MY REPORT

The hand meant to type: _____

The killer is _____

Stuck? Ada's notes: page 135. How it closed: page 141, upside down.

COLD CASE DETECTIVE 105

1. The story. Read it all; the last lines of the note in italics tell you what to look for.
2. The date. Every file is set at a real moment in Millbrook's history, 1998 to 2026.
3. The people with a reason, and what each of them says.
4. Ada's card. A nudge, never the answer.
5. The exhibits. Everything you need is in them, and nothing is there by accident.
6. My report. Write your answer here, then check it at the back.

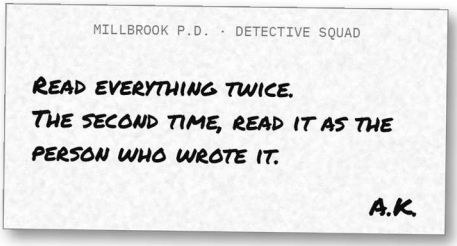
Each file has one answer, and everything you need is on its pages. Files 37 to 40 also lean on earlier files; the text tells you which.

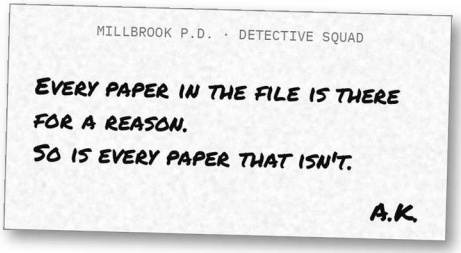
Stuck? Ada's notes are at the back, a few per file. Read one, then try again. How it closed explains the reasoning. The names are on the very last page, written backwards.

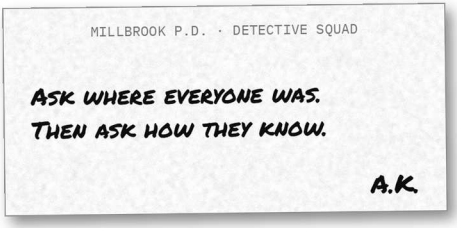
WHAT ADA TAUGHT ME

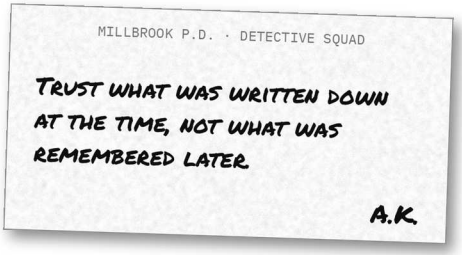
Ada's rules

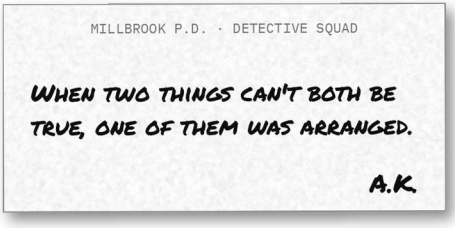
Besides the one stuck to my first file, she had a handful of others. None of them will solve a file for you. All of them will help.

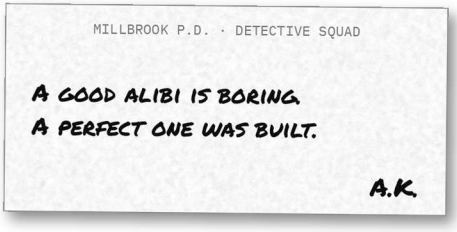


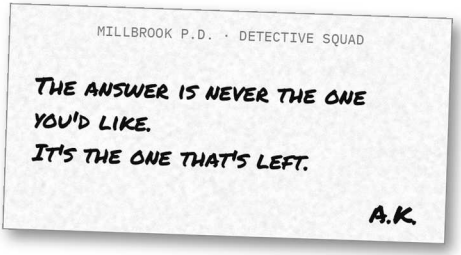


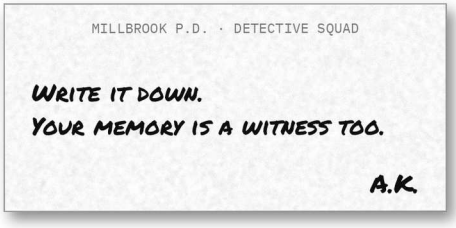












Case log

Tick each file when it's closed, and note your time if you like. The magnifiers show how hard each file is, from one (a warm-up) to five (the hardest in the box). They mostly climb as the years go by.

FILE	TITLE	YEAR	PAGE	DIFFICULTY	SOLVED	TIME
01	The Last Train at Millbrook	1998	10	1	☐	
02	First Prize, Last Slice	1999	14	1	☐	
03	The Honey Stall	1999	18	2	☐	
04	Gutter Ball	2000	22	1	☐	
05	Overdue	2000	26	1	☐	
06	Class of '80	2000	28	2	☐	
07	The Tape Doesn't Lie	2000	32	3	☐	
08	Close Shave	2001	36	3	☐	
09	Passed to the Left	2001	40	1	☐	
10	Mirror, Mirror	2002	42	1	☐	
11	Prepaid	2002	44	1	☐	
12	One at a Time	2003	48	1	☐	
13	Short Count	2003	50	2	☐	
14	Last Words	2004	54	2	☐	
15	Fresh Powder	2004	56	3	☐	
16	The Lineup	2005	60	2	☐	
17	Word Mode	2005	64	2	☐	
18	Badge 112	2006	66	3	☐	
19	Long Shadows	2006	70	4	☐	
20	Strip-Cut	2007	74	3	☐	
21	Closed Road	2007	76	4	☐	
22	The Background	2008	80	3	☐	
23	Four Keys	2009	82	2	☐	
24	Line of Sight	2010	84	2	☐	
25	Nobody's Name	2011	86	3	☐	
26	The Ladder	2011	88	3	☐	
27	Black Horse	2012	90	4	☐	
28	Two by Two	2013	92	5	☐	
29	Burning Down	2014	96	4	☐	
30	The Cake Knife	2015	98	4	☐	
31	The Other Side of the Door	2016	100	5	☐	
32	In the Dark	2017	104	5	☐	
33	Our Window	2018	106	4	☐	
34	Half Seven	2019	108	4	☐	
35	Sunday Call	2020	110	5	☐	
36	Step Challenge	2021	114	5	☐	
37	Steno	2022	116	5	☐	
38	Hours to Days	2023	120	5	☐	
39	Same Angle	2025	122	4	☐	
40	Blue Heron	2026	126	5	☐	

The Last Train at Millbrook



> *My second week in uniform. For twenty years, Walter Briggs ran the same toy train at eight o'clock every Tuesday night. That Tuesday it never left the siding.*
>
> *Four people had a reason to be near Walter that night, and all four told me where they were. One of them couldn't account for the minutes that mattered.*
>
> S.N.

Every Tuesday, the Millbrook Model Railway Society meets in an old brick clubhouse on Elm Street. Upstairs, the members' pride fills a whole room: a miniature valley with forty yards of track.

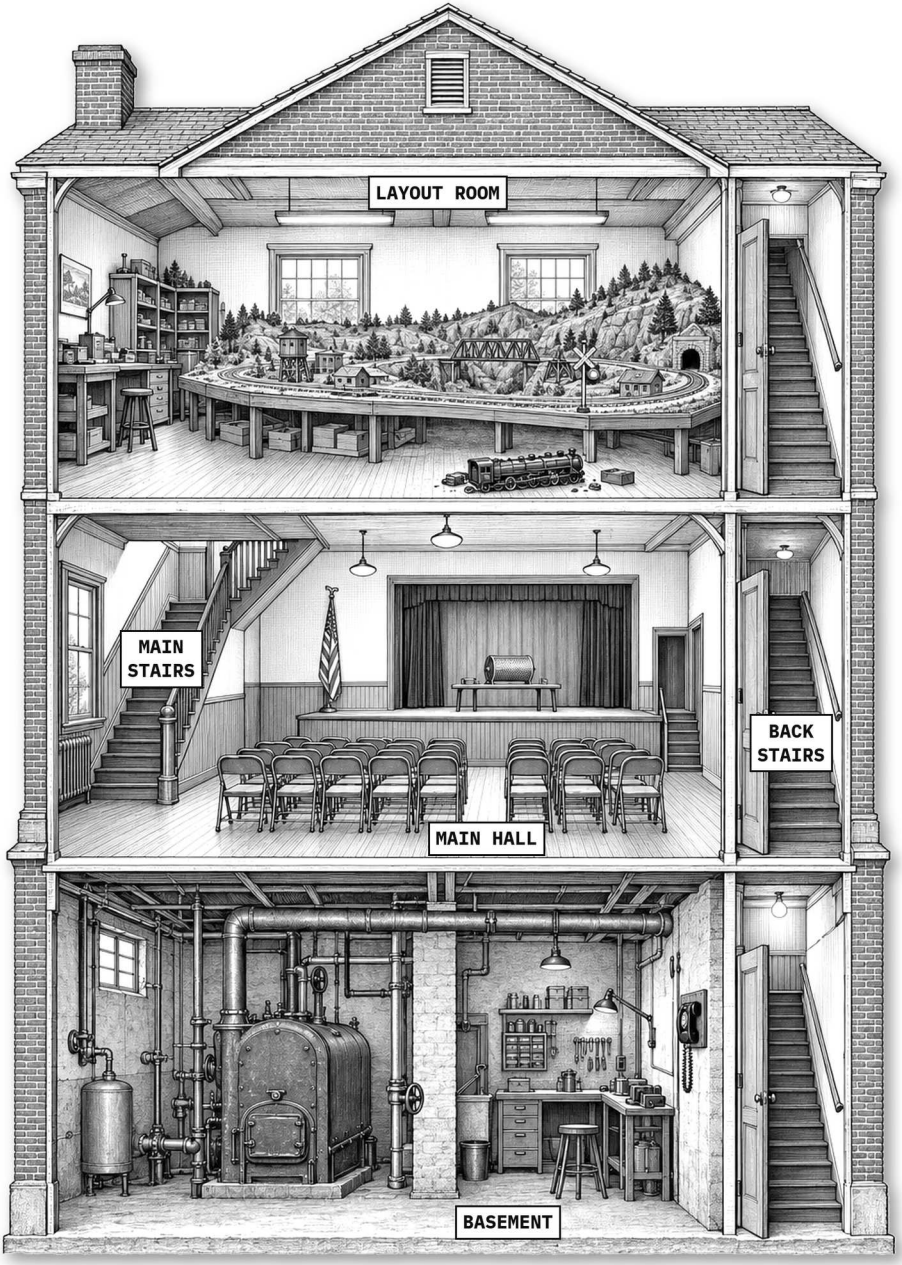
Walter Briggs, 71, had been the club's treasurer for twenty years. He also kept one ritual. At exactly 8:00 PM, he sent the 8:00 Express around the layout. Whenever a train crossed the little railroad crossing, a bell rang, loud enough to be heard in the main hall downstairs. Walter wrote every run in the club's run log. In twenty years, he never missed the Express.

That night, the bell stayed silent.

At 8:20 PM, secretary Doris Kemp climbed the stairs, found Walter on the floor of the layout room and screamed. Someone had struck him down with a heavy brass locomotive. The 8:00 Express sat on its siding, ready to go, its power switch on. The run log lay open beside it.

The clubhouse has three levels: the basement, the main hall and the layout room. The main staircase links the hall to the layout room. A narrow back staircase links all three levels. The cutaway opposite shows both.





The clubhouse on Elm Street. Two staircases: the main one, and the back one.

THE SUSPECTS

DORIS KEMP *Club secretary. Found the body.*

Says: "I ran the raffle on the stage from 7:30 to 8:15."
Proof: About thirty members in the hall confirm Doris never left the stage between 7:30 and 8:15.

FRANK OSEI *Vice president. Wanted control of the club's money.*

Says: "I left early to buy paint for the scenery."
Proof: Exhibit C. The cashier, Pam, remembers serving him. Hollis Hardware is a 25-minute drive from the clubhouse.

LENA VOSS *Newest member. Argued with Walter about unpaid dues.*

Says: "I came straight from my shift at the diner."
Proof: The Route 9 Diner manager confirms Lena never left the counter from 3:00 PM until she clocked out at 7:55 PM. The diner is a 10-minute drive from the clubhouse.

GUS TAMBLYN *Caretaker. Walter signed off on his invoices.*

Says: "I was fixing the boiler in the basement all evening. I never came up until Doris screamed."
Proof: Exhibit A. The basement wall phone is the only phone in the clubhouse. His sister Marge confirms she spoke with Gus during that call.

WORKING IT OUT

For each suspect, write down when they are provably somewhere else. Drive times count, both ways.

SUSPECT	ELSEWHERE FROM	UNTIL	COULD THEY REACH THE LAYOUT ROOM?
DORIS			
FRANK			
LENA			
GUS			

EXHIBIT A

NORTHLINE TELECOM
CALLS · OCT 13, 1998

Line 555-0172 · clubhouse basement wall phone

NUMBER	START	END	MIN
607-555-0188	4:47 PM	4:49 PM	2
914-555-0143	7:30 PM	7:38 PM	8

607-555-0188: Keller Boiler Supply
914-555-0143: Marge Tamblyn, Poughkeepsie

A SUSPECT'S OWN WORD IS NEVER PROOF.

A.K.

EXHIBIT B

RUN LOG · MILLBROOK MODEL RAILWAY SOCIETY

Tue. Oct 6, 1998
7:15 PM Passenger set, two loops. W.B.
8:00 PM The Express. On time. W.B.
Tue. Oct 13, 1998
6:55 PM Passenger set, two loops. W.B.
7:20 PM Crossing bell tested, OK. W.B.
7:40 PM Freight No. 9, one loop. W.B.

EXHIBIT C

HOLLIS HARDWARE
1180 Route 9, Hollis Corner

TUE 10/13/98
7:52 PM
REG 2 · CASHIER: PAM

PAINT GRN 1QT	8.99
BRUSH FINE TIP	3.49
MASKING TAPE	2.19
SUBTOTAL	14.67
TAX 8%	1.17
TOTAL	**15.84**
CASH	20.00
CHANGE	4.16

OPEN TILL 8 PM WEEKNIGHTS

EXHIBIT D

MILLBROOK POLICE DEPARTMENT
WITNESS STATEMENT

NAME: Ruth Calloway
ROLE: Club member, raffle sales
TAKEN AT: 9:05 PM

FILED

"I sold raffle tickets in the main hall all evening. At twenty to eight the crossing bell rang upstairs, the way it does for every train. At eight o'clock the Express bell did not ring, and Walter never missed it. At 8:02 I saw Gus step out of the back staircase door, wiping his hands on a rag. Lena came in a few minutes later, still in her diner apron."

Ruth Calloway

MY REPORT

Walter was last alive at _____

The killer is _____

The lie that gives it away: _____

Stuck? Ada's notes: page 130. How it closed: page 138.

First Prize, Last Slice



Agnes Thornbury judged pies in Millbrook for thirty years. At the 1999 Strawberry Festival, somebody put poison in her iced tea. Four bakers were on the lawn that afternoon. I took two statements from each of them.

Ada read my notebook twice and told me something it took me a week to understand: three of those bakers never lied to me once. The fourth lied every single time, and the fourth was the one who did it.

S.N.

The Millbrook Courier *SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 1999*

Pie Judge Dies After Festival Collapse

Agnes Thornbury fell ill at the Strawberry Festival. Police say her iced tea was poisoned.

Agnes Thornbury, who judged the Strawberry Festival pie contest for thirty years, died at Millbrook Hospital late Saturday night.

At 2:00 PM she set her glass of iced tea on the judges' table and left to tour the craft tents. At 2:15 she came back, drank the tea and collapsed beside the pies. The county lab found poison in the glass.

The oven tents, the shade tent and the judges' table stand around one open lawn: from any of them you can see the other two. Four bakers spent those fifteen minutes there.

Police took statements from all four. Most knew one another only by sight, and described each other by what they wore.

Festival photographer Gene Kessler took a portrait of each baker at noon. "Nobody changed clothes all day," he said. "It was too busy."

PEOPLE FORGET NAMES. THEY REMEMBER HATS.

A.K.

EXHIBIT A



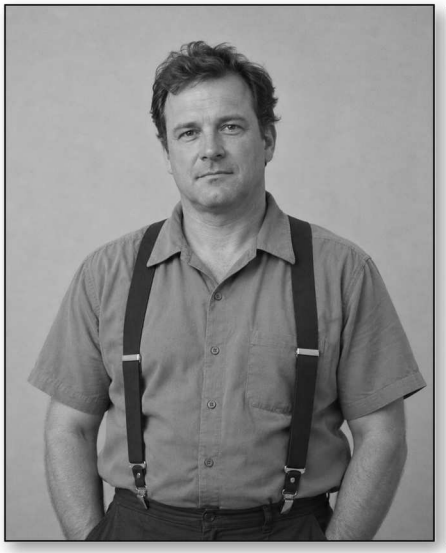
BEA ORTIZ

Agnes marked her down three years running.



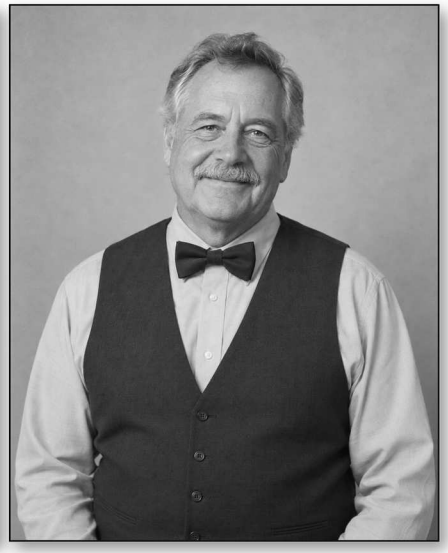
HAZEL HALVORSEN

Agnes's neighbor. A long fight over a fence.



CLAY CARVER

Agnes called his crust "cardboard" in print.



MEL BASSETT

Agnes scored his pies last, every year.

The festival photographer's portraits, taken at noon.

THE BAKERS' STATEMENTS

STATEMENTS · STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL · 06/12/99

BEA	1. "From two o'clock until Agnes collapsed, the one in suspenders never left the shade tent." 2. "Around five past two, the straw hat went over to the judges' table and came straight back."
HAZEL	1. "Between two and two-fifteen, I went to the judges' table once, at 2:05, to leave my entry card." 2. "Walking back, I passed the bow tie out on the lawn, heading toward the table."
CLAY	1. "From two o'clock until Agnes collapsed, the striped apron never left the oven tents." 2. "At about 2:06, the bow tie got up and left our shade tent."
MEL	1. "From two o'clock until Agnes collapsed, the one in suspenders and I sat together in the shade tent." 2. "At ten past two, the sun visor went to the judges' table."