

TAMPA MORNING TRIBUNE

TAMPA, FLORIDA

THE TAMPA MORNING TRIBUNE, SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 1909

DREAD "BLACK HAND" SNATCHES AWAY LIFE OF FICARROTTA * AT VERY GATE OF HIS WEST TAMPA HOME

Assassins Lay in Wait to Blow his Brains Out – Leave Guns in Street and Flee toward River For Safety

NO CLUE FOUND

WEST TAMPA IN FURORE OVER SECOND ASSASSINATION THIS YEAR

Officers Arrive on Scene Immediately, But Only Evidence They Find is Dead Man and Empty Guns on Grounds

Returning to his home on Green street, West Tampa, after making a trip to the City, G. Ficarrotta, the well known wholesale grocer and member of the West Tampa City Council, was shot and instantly killed by unknown parties, who waited in ambush just outside his gate. After doing the shooting the unknown men escaped by running at full speed in the direction of the river, dropping two shotguns as they ran. A few seconds later neighbors rushed out and found Ficarrotta breathing his last without having had an opportunity to state who his assailants were.

There were several persons on the street within a distance of two blocks at the time of the shooting, and one of these, Rafael Blonde, declares that after the shooting he saw three men run away, but he did not get close enough to them to see who they were or note anything about them by which they can be identified. He then rushed to the assistance of Ficarrotta, and found him lying in a dying condition in the middle of the street.

Mystery is Baffling

Who the parties are who did the killing and what their purpose was in committing the act is a deep mystery which is puzzling the authorities and which may never be solved. Members of Ficarrotta's family and his close friends say that they know no reason why he should have been assassinated, as he had no enemies so far as known and has never done anything which could possibly excite the ire of a blank hand or mafia organization. Ficarrotta's relatives were in such an excited condition last night they were unable to give very coherent replies to the questions asked them by the authorities.

One of the first men on the scene was Chief Logan of West Tampa fire department, who rushed to Ficarrotta's house as soon as he heard the shots. He picked up and took charge of the shotguns which were left by the assassins and later turned them over to county officers. On examination it was found that both barrels of each gun had been exploded and all appeared to have been recent. Witnesses state that they heard only three shots fired, and some say that one of them sounded like a rifle. It is believed that both barrels of one of the guns were shot at the same time, and that one of the barrels of the other gun was fired, the other empty shell being accounted for by some recent hunting expedition. That rifle, if there was one, was carried away.

Officers Arrive

Immediately after the murder took place, parties telephoned Sheriff Jackson and he sent Deputy Sheriff George Bell at once, that officer arriving within half an hour after the shooting. Later other officers arrived, and they at once went to work with Mr. Bell on the case. Among those going over from the city when the news reached Tampa were Deputy Sheriff Tom James and Acting Municipal Judge Larimore. Constable Gonzalez and members of the West Tampa police force went to work and representatives of the sheriff's office and investigated everything which they thought could possibly be of value in tracing the criminals.

Thinking that there might be something about the two shotguns which would identify their owners, Deputy Sheriff Bell subjected both to a minute examination. Both were of the ordinary variety such as are used for hunting quail and game. One of the guns had a leather sling by which it could be swung over the shoulder and more easily carried. The shells were examined with the result noted above. There were no names, initials or other strange marks which could make them distinctive or in any way make known the names of their owners., but the guns will be kept and a more careful examination will be made today, when the officers will have more time to devote to it.

Bloodhounds Suggested

It was suggested to one of the officers that, as the guns belonging to the men had been secured, bloodhounds might be put on the scent and lead to the capture of the guilty parties. For a time the matter was considered, but it was decided that the dogs would be no use on such a frequented street and where so many footsteps cross and recross each other. By the time the dogs could have been put on the ground the scene of the murder and adjacent ground for several blocks would have been trampled upon by several thousand people.

Inquest Is Held

Arriving at the scene a short time after the murder, Justice Boyett began to work on the case, and secured a coroner's jury to view the body, which had been left lying in the street in the same position in which it had fallen. A jury consisting of Lee McLaughlin, J.W. Brooks, Walter Andrews, G.H. Riggsbee, Arthur Schlemann and Juan Romera was secured to make the necessary investigation. An examination of Ficarrotta's body showed that all three shots had taken effect in the back of his head, coming out in parts of the face and left eye. The body was covered with blood and horrible to look upon.

Justice Boyett questioned as many witnesses as possible, but nothing very material was developed. He attempted to secure a statement from members of the Ficarrotta's family regarding any possible cause for the affair, but they were so broken up that no intelligent statement could be gotten from any of them and it was decided to take adjournment until tomorrow morning, when every phase of the case will be gone into fully as possible and no stone will be left unturned which may lead up to the apprehension of the guilty parties.

Heart Rendering Scenes

Members of Ficarrotta's family were nearly crazed with grief last night, and wailed loudly for several hours after the murder. In vain did neighbors attempt to comfort them or offer consolation. At one stage of the horrible affair and before the body had been taken into the house, the dead man's wife and daughter insisted in staying in the street and falling prostrate beside the remains. With loud wailing they would take the dead man's head and hold it and beg him to come back to life once more. But the dead never answer, and the only result was a sigh of intense pity which went up from the hundreds who crowded about.

Ficarrotta leaves a wife and several children, some of them grown, to mourn his loss. Never was family sorer distressed at the loss of a loving husband and father, and scores of friends last night joined in comforting the family as best they could. No arrangements were made last night for the funeral everyone being too wrought up to attend to them. The body, however was turned over to Undertaker Reed and afterward removed to Reed undertaking establishment. The arrangements probably will be made today and the funeral probably will take place tomorrow.

Was Leading Citizen

G. Ficarrotta, the man who was assassinated, was one of West Tampa's leading, most progressive and substantial business men and citizens. He had been in West Tampa for years and had a wide acquaintance among all nationalities. Everyone who knew Ficarrotta liked him and hundreds were proud to call him their friend. The deceased has scores of friends among the business men with whom he has had dealings for many years, having been engaged in the wholesale business and owning the largest wholesale grocery in West Tampa. Ficarrotta was recently elected to the city council and during the brief time which he held that position fulfilled his duties to the satisfaction of all.

The killing of Ficarrotta is, in some respects, on a parallel with the murder of Antonio Urso, committed early in December, when he was a guest at a christening, when he was called to the front gate and shot. Antonio Chiramante was declared to be the murderer, but in spite of all, the efforts of the officers, is still at large. The frequency of these affairs has aroused the authorities to a more determined activity than ever, and every effort will be made to stamp them out. It is getting so that no citizen can with assurance call himself safe on the streets after dark.

Search Given Up

At 1 a.m. officers after spending several hours in unsuccessful search for the assassin, given up the search for the night, as there appeared to be nothing left to do. The chase will be taken up this morning and prosecuted with renewed vigor and, it is hoped, a good chance of success.

(*) The newspaper used an incorrect spelling of the name, Figarota which was later corrected.

Originally published by:
TAMPA MORNING TRIBUNE
Sunday, April 11, 1909