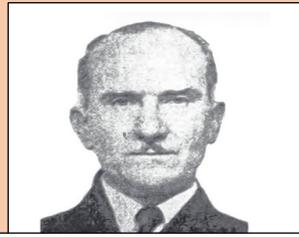


MURDER ON GOOD FRIDAY

Bombings in Pittston

WHEN?
April 10, 1938

WHERE?
Wyoming Valley



Michael Fugmann

EVENT
Disguised cigar boxes held bombs

VOCABULARY
bootleg colliery
conciliation sexton

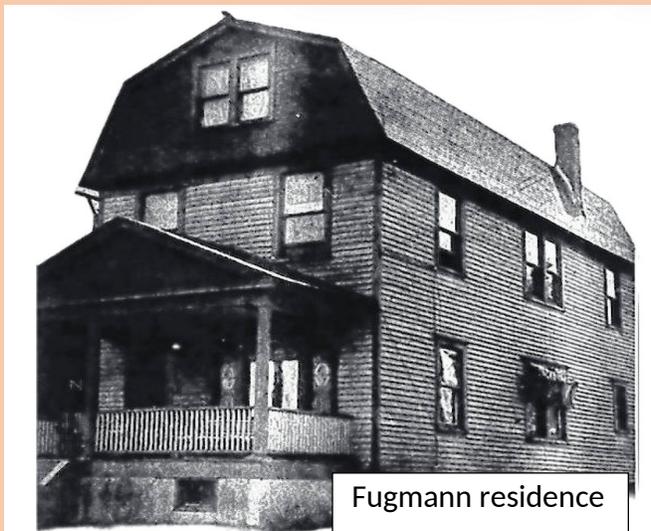
Reverend John J. Curran was in his rectory when he heard the news of the bombings. His friends, Michael Gallagher the sexton at his church, and Thomas Maloney and his four-year old son, had been killed by bombs put in cigar boxes delivered to the men. Rev. Curran collapsed onto the floor. Later that day his rectory was found on fire and he lost many of his prized possessions. He died a few months later with many believing that his death was hastened by the tragic news. A total of six people had bombs addressed to them—four were intercepted and dropped in buckets of water. The packages delivered on April 10, 1936, were dubbed the Good Friday bombings.

Curran had worked hard to lessen tensions between competing miner unions—the United Anthracite Miners of Pennsylvania (UAMP) led at one time by Mahoney and the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) led by John Lewis. The UMWA was a national union but many local miners viewed it as working with the coal operators and more sympathetic to the bituminous miners rather than anthracite miners. That is why the UAMPs popularity was growing in the area. Bootleg mining was one of the more



contentious issues. That was when miners illegally took coal from company property during the Great Depression. Many threats and fights occurred over which union better represented the interest of the miners. Mahoney and some other UAMP leaders had been jailed for a month. Now men had died. The “why” seemed obvious—somebody had a grudge to settle—but that motive didn’t work for all involved. In the end, the motive was still unclear. The “who” was difficult to figure out at first though diligent police work eventually uncovered the evidence.

Luther Kniffen, the former county sheriff, was spared when his secretary inadvertently disabled the bombs mechanism when she tried to open the package with a knife. Another one was disarmed by police that had been sent to Harry Gouldstone the superintendent of the Buttonwood colliery. He had been alerted to the bombings and warned his family not to touch the box, so they were spared (Times-Leader Good Friday). Two others were not delivered—one to Judge Benjamin Jones and one to James Gorman a state Anthracite Conciliation Board Umpire; the boxes were intercepted at post offices (Times Leader Good Friday). The police organized the largest manhunt to date to figure out who was responsible.



Fingerprints of the boxes were gathered, questions asked about who recently purchased cigar boxes, who had knowledge about how to construct dynamite bombs, and who had motive. Over 50 suspects were interviewed, their stories checked and rechecked. On July 2, 1936, a suspect Michael Fugmann, was detained. Fugmann, a former miner and a close friend of Mahoney at one time, was charged with the crimes on July 8 (Times Leader Look Back). Though he continually protested his innocence to the moment he died in the electric chair, prosecutors pointed out that

he was identified by a store clerk as the one who purchased cigar boxes from Shulte's Cigar Store on East Market Street in the city (Times Leader bombings). Investigators found brown wrapping paper at his home just like the kind used to wrap the boxes. Dynamite had been used in the bombings and that, too, was found in Fugmann's home. Evidence was shown that Fugmann was on a blasting crew while serving in the German Army during World War I. (He later deserted from the service.) It was also discovered that Fugmann and Maloney had a falling out over the direction of the United Anthracite Miners union which disbanded in 1935 amidst vehement arguing and violence (Roberts 103). It was discovered that Fugmann had loaned Maloney over \$500 which Maloney had failed to pay back (Times Leader Good Friday). His handwriting also matched the addresses written on the packages. Although Fugmann repeatedly said that someone had stolen the boxes and was framing him, he had no explanation for his handwriting on the packages.

Over 130 witnesses came forward during the trial. Fugmann was convicted by the 12 jurors in October. He appealed the decision until he could no longer do so. Before his execution on July 17, 1938 at Rockview State Prison in Bellefonte, Fugmann lamented, "I am paying with my life for a crime I did not commit," (Times Leader Look Back). He was buried in St. Mary's cemetery in Hanover Township.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Times Leader Good Friday Bombings](#)

[Times Leader Look Back](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Kashatus, William. *Valley With a Heart*. Luzerne Co., PA: Luzerne County Historical Society and Luzerne County Community College. 2012.

Roberts, Ellis. *The Breaker Whistle Blows*. Scranton: Anthracite Museum Press. 1984