

# **The Lizzie Borden Murder Mystery**

## **A Haunting in Fall River**

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The case of Lizzie Borden has fascinated many Americans for 120 years. Only a few cases in history have attracted as much attention as the hatchet murders of Andrew Borden and his wife, Abby. This is partly because of the gruesome act that was carried out on that hot August day in 1892 and partly because Lizzie Borden was a demure, respectable, spinster and Sunday school teacher. The entire town was shocked when she was charged with the murder of her parents.



**“Lizzie Borden took an axe  
And gave her mother forty whacks  
When she saw what she had done  
She gave her father forty-one.”**



Andrew Jackson Borden was a prominent citizen of the prosperous mill town and seaport called Fall River, Massachusetts. The Borden family was well known in the community and had been among the most influential citizens of the region for decades. Andrew Borden was one of the richest men in the city at age 70. He was a director on the board of several banks and a commercial landlord with many holdings. He was known to be thrifty and had a hard attitude. He was not well-liked by many.

Andrew Borden lived in a three story home with his second wife, Abby Durfee Gray, and his daughters from his first marriage, Emma and Lizzie. Lizzie was a Sunday school teacher and considered a spinster since she was 32 years old and not married. Her older sister, Emma, was also unmarried. It was located in a middle-class part of town and was close to his business interests. Both daughters felt the house was beneath their social status and begged their father to move to a nicer home in a wealthy part of town, but their father was too frugal to even consider this.

On the morning of Thursday, August 4, 1892, the maid, Bridget Sullivan, came downstairs from her attic room around to build a fire in the kitchen and begin cooking breakfast. Emma was visiting friends in the nearby town of Fairhaven and Mr. Borden left shortly after breakfast to tend to

business. Abby Borden went upstairs to make the bed in the guestroom that Lizzie's Uncle Morse had been staying in. He had left to visit other family in the area. Abby asked Bridget to wash the windows, went downstairs for a few moments and then went back up again to get fresh pillowcases. Bridget started on the window washing as she went to retrieve pails of water from the only place on the property with plumbing, the barn. She stopped to chat over the fence with another servant friend working at the home next door.

Andrew Borden had returned home and was let in by Bridget shortly after she had come inside from washing the windows. Lizzie came downstairs to tell her father that Mrs. Borden had received a note asking her to respond to someone who was sick and went out to tend to them. Lizzie and her sister had always called their step-mother Mrs. Borden and recently their relationship had been strained. In fact, the entire family had been arguing frequently and often did not share meals together aside from Mr. and Mrs. Borden.



Left: Andrew Jackson Borden; Middle: Abby Durfee Gray Borden; Right: Emma Borden

In the days leading up to the double murder, Lizzie's parents had been suffering from a stomach illness that they suspected may have come from some spoiled food, milk or even poison from someone who did not like Mr. Borden. On the day of the murders, Lizzie's father had returned home because he was still not feeling well and had decided to lie down on the family couch in the living room. The servant, Bridget (Lizzie and Emma insisted on calling her "Maggie" which was the name of their former maid.), was also starting to feel a bit ill and went upstairs to her attic room to rest.

Bridget had only dozed off for a little while before she awoke to Lizzie shouting from the bottom of the back stairs for her to hurry down. She yelled to come quickly and that someone had come in and killed her father. When Bridget reached the bottom of the stairs, she found Lizzie standing at the back door. Lizzie stopped her from going into the sitting room and told her to run and get the doctor.

The neighbor, Mrs. Adelaide Churchill, came over and found Lizzie at the back door. She asked what had happened and where her father was. When she asked her where she was when the event happened, Lizzie replied that she was in the barn loft searching for some iron for fishing sinkers. Mrs. Churchill then asked Lizzie where her mother was. Lizzie replied she didn't know, but that she thought she had heard her come home. By then, the doctor had arrived and found that Mr. Borden had eleven sharp blows to his face and head. He and the doctor were friends and even the doctor had a hard time identifying that it was Mr. Borden.

Several minutes passed before Lizzie went to Bridget and said she was sure she had heard her step-mother come home. She asked her to go upstairs and see. Bridget refused to go by herself, so the neighbor, Mrs. Churchill, agreed to go with her. It was Mrs. Churchill that found Mrs. Borden on the floor of the guest bedroom face down in a pool of blood. It appeared as if someone had come up behind her while she was on her knees making the guest bed. The doctor confirmed over a dozen strikes to the back of her head from likely the same sharp object; probably from the same hatchet that killed her husband except that her blood was congealed indicating that she had been killed before her husband. Her autopsy later revealed that there were nineteen deadly blows to her skull.



Left: The family living room where Mr. Borden's body was found. Right: The guest bedroom. Mrs. Borden was found face down on the floor between the bed and the dresser. The actual crime scene photos are readily available online but are too gruesome to post in this newsletter.

That day just happened to be the same day as the Fall River Police Department's annual picnic and most of them were off enjoying an outing at Rocky Point. The only officer dispatched to the house was Officer George W. Allen. He ran 400 yards to the house, saw that Andrew Borden was dead and ran back to the station house to inform the city marshal of the murders and left no one in charge of the crime scene. While he was gone, neighbors poured into the house, comforting Lizzie and peaking in at the gruesome condition of Andrew Borden's body. The constant traffic destroyed any clues that might have been left behind.

Over the course of several weeks, investigators managed to come up with a scenario that had cast suspicion on Lizzie. This was especially true when a friend of Lizzie had caught her burning a dress with a dark stain on it just three days after the murders. Lizzie claimed she brushed up against some wet paint and the dress was ruined. It was her friend's testimony that convinced the judge to charge Lizzie with the murders and take her into custody. She pled not guilty and was eventually acquitted. The trial lasted fourteen-days and news of it was on the cover of every major newspaper in the country.

Five weeks after the trial, Lizzie (who called herself "Lizbeth" after the trial) and her sister, Emma, purchased and moved into a thirteen-room, stone house located on "The Hill", the most upscale area of the city. Lizzie named the house "Maplecroft" and had the name carved into the top step leading up to the front door.

Many theories about what actually happened are still discussed today. No one else has ever been charged in the murders. We may never know what truly happened that hot August day in Fall River. It's



also unlikely that we will ever discover just what Lizzie's defense counsel really knew about the events in 1892. The papers from her defense are still sealed away in the offices of the Springfield, Massachusetts law firm that descended from the firm that defended Lizzie during the trial. There are no plans to ever release them.

"Who killed Mr. and Mrs. Borden?" is now not the only question that surrounds this story. Nowadays, many wonder "Who haunts the Borden home at 92 Second Street?" In the years since the murders and the trial, the house has gone on to become the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast Museum. The owners have kept the home as it was in the era when the murders took place and use it as a quaint inn. Guests come from all over the country hoping to be able to sleep in the room where Abby Borden was killed. Not all of them are able to sleep peacefully -- and not all of the spirits here rest in peace.

Guests and staff members report sounds of a woman weeping and others claim to have seen a woman in Victorian era clothing dusting the furniture and straightening out the covers on the beds. This has been known to happen when guests are still in bed! Others have heard sounds of footsteps going up and down the stairs and crossing back and forth on the floor above, even when they know the house is empty. Doors open and close often and muffled conversation can be heard coming from vacant rooms.

One man, who was a skeptic of the paranormal, was bringing him and his wife's luggage up to their room. He noticed the bed was perfectly made with the covers nice and smooth. Over the course of a few minutes of unpacking, he turned and noticed the bed was rumpled and folded as if someone was lying in the bed with an indent on the pillow in the shape of a human head. He was in the room alone and had been nowhere near the bed.

A few minutes later, his wife found him sitting in the downstairs sitting room. His face was very pale and he seemed very nervous. When she asked him what was wrong, he took her back upstairs to show her the strange shape in the bed. However, when he opened the door the pillow had been plumped and the comforter looked just as it did when he first entered the room. This was the room where Abby Borden had been murdered.



Left: The Borden Home in the late 1800's; Right: The Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast Museum today.