Tracing Crime Through Time

Genealogy Methods for True Crime Research

Case study: Fort Wayne's 1940s "Killer in the Rain" investigations

The genealogist's approach

- Identify people precisely before forming a theory.
- Build a timeline from independent records.
- Track addresses, occupations, relatives, associates, and neighbors.
- Compare conflicting accounts rather than choosing the most dramatic one.
- Separate documented fact, contemporary allegation, later interpretation, and speculation.

Case study at a glance

Date	Person or event	Research significance
Feb. 1944	Wilhelmina "Billie" Haaga	First death in the later series; work, household, route, and witness evidence
May 1944	Anna Kuzeff	Work schedule, bus route, neighborhood, and false confession
Aug. 1944	Phyllis Conine	Last known movements, witnesses, vehicle questions, later prosecution
Mar. 1945	Dorothea Howard	Multiple suspects and later appellate review
1947	Ralph Lobaugh	Confessions, recantations, guilty pleas, later clemency
1948 to 1950	Robert Christen	Identification evidence, conviction, reversal, dismissal
1949 to 1951	Franklin Click	Geographic connections, confession and recantation, trial and execution

Core record sets

Census records: Household, age, occupation, relatives, neighbors, migration.

City directories: Annual address, spouse, occupation, employer, street by street neighborhood reconstruction.

Newspapers: Crime reports, witness statements, arrests, trials, appeals, editorials, corrections, social context.

Vital records: Identity, relationships, dates, cause of death, informants.

Court records: Charges, docket entries, testimony, verdicts, appeals, case numbers.

Institutional records: Prison, clemency, coroner, military, school, employment, property, probate, and archival collections.

Research worksheet

Focused research question: _____

Person being studied: _____

Name variants: _____

Key relatives or associates: _____

Known addresses: _____

Occupation or employer: _____

Important dates: _____

Records already found: _____

Contradictions to resolve: _____

Next three searches: _____

Build a master timeline

Date	Person	Event or claim	Source	Confidence

Source evaluation questions

- Who created the record?
- When was it created relative to the event?
- How did the creator know the information?
- Was the information original or copied?
- What bias, pressure, political interest, memory problem, or other limitation may have affected it?

- What independent source could confirm or contradict it?

Testing a confession or accusation

- Was the information already public?
- Does the statement contain details that can be independently verified?
- Can the person be placed in the correct location at the correct time?
- Does the account remain consistent across retellings?
- Was the statement later recanted or challenged?
- Do records support the route, vehicle, workplace, address, or relationship described?

FAN research

Friends, Associates, and Neighbors: Search beyond the central person. Coworkers, relatives, landlords, neighbors, witnesses, vehicle owners, and other associates can provide the record that connects a person to a place or disproves an assumption.

Ethical checklist

- Use neutral language and distinguish accusation, arrest, charge, conviction, and exoneration.
- Do not present speculation as fact.
- Remember that victims, suspects, witnesses, and descendants are real people.
- Respect restrictions on modern records and the privacy of living people.
- Cite sources clearly enough that another researcher can evaluate your conclusion.

Case study exercise

Choose one person or disputed claim from the Fort Wayne case. Write one focused question, identify three record groups that could answer it, and note what evidence would strengthen or weaken the claim.

Focused question	
Record group 1	
Record group 2	
Record group 3	

Case study source

Richard Battin, "Killer in the Rain," News Sentinel, February 5, 1994.
http://egen.fortwayne.com/ns/projects/history/rhist10.php

Research note: Battin reported that many original police and sheriff records from the 1940s had been lost or destroyed by the time he reconstructed the story. That makes this case especially useful for demonstrating how genealogists work around missing records by correlating newspapers, court material, addresses, occupations, family relationships, and other surviving sources.