Ruby, Don’t Take Your Love to Town


Robert Daniel Edwards was the middle child of Daniel Webster Edwards and his wife Julia. Born in December of 1885, Robert was raised in the stone house that his great grandfather had built on Judd Road in Easton just south of the Monroe town line. Daniel worked the farm alongside of his father Albert until the elder Edwards passed in 1888.

Robert was married for a short time in the early 1900’s before divorcing his wife and moving back into his parents’ home. He then had a live-in relationship with a married woman in Newtown whom he listed as his “housekeeper” in the 1920 U.S. Census. Robert was a day laborer and a wood cutter. Sometime around 1922, he and his housekeeper parted company and Robert again returned to live in the family home on Judd Road.

Ruby Wells was born in 1904, the third of seven children born to Thomas and Minnie
Wells. The Wells lived on North Street in a 1790 home that still stands today. In early 1922, at the age of only 18, she took up with 36-year old Robert Edwards and in June of that year, the pair threatened to elope if Thomas Wells didn’t give them his blessing to marry. Reluctantly, the elder Wells agreed to the union and the pair was married.

Robert Edwards insisted that the newly married couple live with his aging parents on the family homestead. Daniel Edwards was then 70-years of age and walked with the aid of a crutch. He could no longer milk his cows nor till his land. He was a well-known and respected member of the community, having served multiple terms in the state assembly as a representative from the town in which he was born. Robert would attempt to maintain the then failing farm, doing the work that his father could no longer handle, but the money the farm earned could barely keep food on the table.
Friends and family of young Ruby related that she was never happy with the couple’s living arrangements. The house was small, and the couple had little privacy. The young bride complained often that her husband was unwilling to seek work elsewhere and move into a home they could call their own. She complained bitterly that Robert’s mother Julia made living with the elder Edwards a torturous experience and that Robert’s jealous nature kept her close to home where he could keep a close eye on her interactions with her family and neighbors.

One of Ruby’s friends was the young widow of Glover Blackman. Mrs. Blackman encouraged Ruby and Robert to accompany her to one of the weekly dances held at Schwartz’s Grove. Robert initially balked at the idea, claiming that he didn’t like the “rough element” that attended, but he finally acquiesced and took Ruby just once in the spring of 1923. While Ruby enjoyed the experience, Robert did not. He worried that some of the younger men at the dance had found his wife attractive and that she had encouraged their friendly advances. He began to act extremely jealous and kept his pretty young wife on an even shorter leash than before.

According to Ruby’s parents, she began complaining to them about Robert’s melancholy moods and his extreme jealousy. The couple argued constantly, and Ruby threatened to leave on several occasions.

In mid-May of 1923, less than one year after she married Robert, she abandoned Robert and moved home with her parents.
For the next two weeks, Robert called at the Wells’ home every day pleading with his wife to return to him. Thomas Wells more than once enjoined his daughter to return to the Edwards’ home with Robert, but she would have no part of it. Almost every encounter between Ruby and Robert ended in a heated exchange.

A desperate Edwards then accused Wells’ neighbor Alma Swenson of inviting Ruby over to meet men. He was particularly jealous of a young man named Frank Conklin whom Edwards had seen talking to Ruby at the dance in Schwartz’s Grove and who was a friend of the Swenson’s. Robert circulated false stories that the Swensons and the Wells were involved in making illegal liquor and that he had seen Thomas Wells purchase copper tubing for his still.

On a Sunday visit to the Wells’ home on May 27th, Ruby told Robert that she would only consider reuniting with her husband if he found a job and a different place for the couple to take up housekeeping. Finally, Robert agreed to seek employment and a new place for the couple to live.

On Monday the 28th, Robert spent the day in Redding looking for work. He returned late in the afternoon with two offers. The first was from Noble Hoggson’s farm superintendent, Ernest W. Kriss, for a job working at Fairfield Manor, Hoggson’s impressive Pleasant Valley estate at the foot of Church Hill Road. It paid $20 a week and included accommodations. The second offer was a bit more modest – a job working on heiress Esther Dimon Waterman’s Redding estate where he could also rent one of her cottages for only $6 a month. Surely Ruby would then agree to return to him.
But she didn’t. Perhaps she never believed Robert would leave his parents. Perhaps she thought both those offers of employment and lodging were simply fabrications by her estranged husband to get her to leave her parents’ home. Or perhaps she never had any intention at all of going back to him. In any event, a dejected Robert told Thomas Wells to inform Kriss that he no longer had any interest in working for Hoggson when Kriss was scheduled to call him at the Wells’ home on Tuesday.

Robert brooded most of Tuesday. His father said he had been spending more time alone in the barn since Ruby had left him.

Alma Swenson’s house on North Street where Ruby visited on the night of May 30, 1923
There was full moon on Wednesday the 30th. Ruby had gone to her neighbor’s home earlier in the evening to deliver a telephone message her parents had received for Alma Swenson. She remained at the Swenson home until around 10:00 PM when Alma and her two sons, 19-year old Arthur and 16-year old Albert decided to walk her home. As they turned west onto North Street, they heard a familiar voice call from the shadows. It was Robert, pleading to talk once more to Ruby about coming back to him. Ruby kept walking, informing her husband from over her shoulder that if he wished to talk to her that he could do so “up at the house.” She continued on, chatting with her friends as they walked.

“Ruby, if you don’t talk to me, you’ll be sorry,” Robert was then quoted as saying. The tone of his voice made his young wife stop and turn in his direction. He once more implored her to return to him. As she turned her back to him to continue walking with her friends, Robert took a shot gun from beneath his jacket and fired it, striking Ruby squarely between the shoulders. As she fell and rolled over in pain, he walked up to her and put a second round into her chest before turning and walking calmly into the darkness of the woods to the north.

The Swensons rushed back to find a mortally wounded Ruby barely breathing. They carried her back to their house and one of the boys ran to the Wells’ home where he called, first a doctor, and then the County Sheriff. By the time he and Thomas Wells reached the Swenson home, Ruby was dead.

In 1923, Easton had no police force. Elected town constables had the power to detain and serve warrants, but the authority to arrest and investigate criminal acts rested with the County and the State. Deputy Fairfield County Sheriff Frank Olmstead was the first
to arrive on the scene. State Police Sergeant Frank Virelli along with troopers Anthony F. Manion and Bernard Scully from Troop A were also summoned and soon arrived to search the Edwards home and question Robert’s parents. Doctor Ernest H. Smith was called in from Redding to examine the body and confirm Ruby’s death.

It was quickly confirmed that Robert Edwards had an intimate knowledge of the surrounding terrain and given the direction he was headed when he entered the woods, he had the distinct advantage of finding his way up the side of Wintergreen Mountain and then securing a safe hiding spot within the rock formations that were hidden amongst the trees. Finding him would require the formation of a posse.

The Connecticut State Police wouldn’t begin employing the use of dogs to track criminal suspects until 1934, so in 1923, that wasn’t even considered an option in finding Robert Edwards. Instead, a posse was formed mainly of men from the nearby Stepney Volunteer Fire Department. Over a three-day period, there were as many as fifty men searching for Edwards with the largest contingency scouring the woods around Wintergreen Mountain and westward into Pleasant Valley.

There were reports on Friday morning that a man matching Edwards description had been seen boarding a westbound train in Newtown. Edwards had a brother who lived in Danbury near the New York State border and it was feared that he might be heading in that direction. The state police were dispatched to investigate that possibility while a growing posse of volunteers continued to search the woods along the Easton, Newtown, and Redding borders.
The residents of the northernmost part of town spent two restless nights as Robert Edwards remained at-large. There had been no further sightings and the hunch that Edwards had fled to his brother’s home proved fruitless. Locals assumed one of two scenarios. Either the man was still hiding out in the many ledges and crevices in the forest, or perhaps he had taken his own life on the very same night he had murdered his wife. His friend, Gerald Keller, claimed to have heard four shots coming from the vicinity of Wintergreen Mountain less than an hour after Edwards had fatally wounded his young wife. He surmised that Edwards had fired the first three blasts to give searchers a hint as to his location, and then fired a fourth and final shot that took his own life. But in two full days of searching, the posse had found nothing.

It was early morning on Sunday when a posse of some fifty volunteers led by Edwards’ neighbor, Constable Wallace B. Davis, again searched the area where Keller had thought the shots might have come from on the previous Wednesday night. Edwards’ long-time friend, Ernest Canfield, knew the terrain better than anyone else in the group and was convinced that Robert may be hiding among the crevices of an outcropping of rocks near the summit known as Fox Ledge.

It was Canfield who first spotted part of Edwards cap. Then some blood. And finally, a piece of Robert’s skull before finding the body wedged in one of the crevices. It appeared that Keller’s supposition had been correct. There were four spent shotgun shells nearby and by the looks of it, Robert had leaned over the barrel of the gun with his head and pulled the trigger one final time.

The hunt for the killer came to a gruesome end, but more than a few of the members of the make-shift posse were happy to stand with the guns at their side to be photographed
by someone from the Bridgeport Telegram. Their images were displayed in Monday’s edition of the newspaper along with a photo of the ledge where poor Robert’s remains were discovered.

Easton Slayer Evades Posse in Forest Flight


Bridgeport, May 31.—Beating the dense forests in the vicinity of Easton, which extend to the New York state line, a posse of state police and deputy sheriffs was tonight continuing their search for trace of Robert Edwards, 67 year-old farmer and woodsman who Wednesday night murdered his 19 year-old wife, Ruby Wells Edwards on a lonely stretch of road on the outskirts of that town as she was on her way home from a visit to a neighbor’s house with a woman friend and her family.

Consumed by jealousy, Edwards, who has been estranged from his wife for the past two weeks, stepped out of the bushes by the roadside and when his efforts to bring about a reconciliation failed, raised the shot gun to his shoulder and fired, the charge entering the woman’s body between the shoulder blades. The husband then reloaded the gun, and fired another charge into her body while her companions stood by. The murderer then fled and disappeared into the forest.

Shots heard about twenty minutes after Edwards fled led to the suicide. Another report said that the murderer had been seen hurrying through a meadow.

Domestic difficulties brought about the young wife’s desire for a home of her own instead of remaining under the roof of Edwards’ crippled father and aged mother, together with Edwards’ extreme jealousy of his young wife, is believed to have resulted in the crime. Edwards was previously married, having divorced Mamie Williams of Woodbury, a few years ago.
The story made all the papers. The Associated Press was quite adept in telling the sad tale of a young woman whose insanely jealous husband wouldn’t, and couldn’t, live without her. It was big news for three or four days, but when it was over, Easton went back to being a quiet little town where tragedies like that never happen. Only, they do happen in quiet little towns like Easton all across America, and probably will as long as society continues to ignore the tell-tale signs that lead to mental breakdowns like the one that Robert Edwards suffered that night in May of 1923.