

**Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Hughes of Sloan's Grove
Hacked to Death**

Written by [Clarence Crocker](#)

Axe-Murderer is sought in wide area by Police. Few clues are found. Officers seek to connect slayings with deaths of two Petries.

Such was the headline of a front page article appearing in the *Spartanburg Herald* February 25 and 28, 1942

Excerpts from those articles;

“Continuing their far flung search for the axe-murderer who early yesterday hacked to death Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Hughes of the Sloan's Grove community, county authorities last night were attempting to connect the ghastly slaying of the elderly couple with a similar case of little more than a week ago, the murder of aged Columbus and Ida Petrie, brother and sister of the Ben Avon Area.

The bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Hughes, 67 and 65 year of age, respectfully, were found in the farmhouse on the Fernwood-Glendale road at the rear of the Sloan's Grove Baptist Church.

Mrs. Hughes, clad in her nightgown was dead; her head split open by an axe. Her husband, only partly dressed, was found in a dying condition in his bedroom, his head battered by the axe. He died in route to the hospital having never regained consciousness. The axe was found in Mr. Hughes truck which had been abandoned on the Spartanburg-Gaffney highway near the Beaverdam railroad bridge.

Preliminary investigation of the case pointed to several remarkable similarities between the Petrie case of Sunday February 15 in which Columbus Petrie 83 and Ida Petrie 72, were bludgeoned to death and their sister Maggie, was clubbed into a semi unconsciousness from which she had not recovered. The two homes are about 3 miles apart. General consensus was that the man was a crazed maniac. (Maggie Petrie died at the age of 90 in January, 1953)

The bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Hughes were not found until about 10am the day before. The truck belonging to Mr. Hughes, having been found in Cherokee County, was reported to City Policeman B.B. Chapman, son in-law of the Hughes. Arriving at the home, Mr. Chapman found the front door locked. The back screen door was hooked and no one answered his call. Finding evidence that something was wrong, he called Lieut. Carter and together they forced the screen open. Entering the home, they noticed great quantities of blood after which they found the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Hughes. Mr. Hughes was still breathing but unable to speak. Mrs. Hughes was already dead. A call was placed for an ambulance but Mr. Hushes expired before arriving at the hospital. It was surmised that they had retired about 11 PM after listening to President Roosevelt's talk.

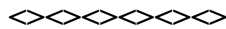
Surviving Mr. and Mrs. Hughes were the following children; Mrs. Chapman, Spartanburg, Mrs. Marie Hughes Fowler of Lexington, N. C., Miss. Mary Hughes, Spartanburg, Miss. Sarah Hughes, teacher in the Oakboro, N. C. school, James Hughes, principal of Cordova, N. C. school, Harley Hughes, Drayton and Mrs. Ethel Bennett, Spartanburg.

Mr. Hughes was survived by the following brothers and sisters; Bynum Hughes, Mooresboro, N. C., Buran Hughes and Mrs. Corrie Piercey, both of Shelby, N. C. Mrs. Hughes was survived by one sister, Mrs. Mattie Garrett of Spartanburg.

After extensive investigation, Jessie Jones, a 19 year old Negro suspect was arrested at the home of his grandmother in Spartanburg. The story of Jones 12 day reign of terror in the Glendale-Ben Avon sections of the county was recounted by six witnesses in a two hours appearance before a Coroner's jury. Spartanburg County Sheriff Sam M. Henry was the principal witness. He told how Jones had admitted to officers that he had killed both of the elderly couples in their homes.

A news article published February 28, 1942 stated that The Coroners jurors found evidence to the effect that J.L. Hughes 67 and his wife, Mrs. Mary Hughes 65, met their death at the hand of Jessie Jones, 18 year old Negro and that Columbus Petrie, 83, and his sister, Ida Petrie, 72, met their death at the hands of the same person and that Jones be held for further investigation.

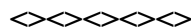
Writer's comments; Jessie Jones had lived with his grandmother in the [Glendale](#) area for some time before the murder. He was tried and found guilty and was executed.



The Family of James L. Hughes

The 1900 Spartanburg Township Census shows he had come from North Carolina and had been married 4 years and was the father of two children. The household was listed as;
James L. Hughes 25, husband/farmer/born July 1875
Wife; Mary 22, born April, 1878
Children; Lillian 3, born September 1896 Florence 1, born October, 1898

The 1910 Spartanburg Township Census listed the household as;
James L. 35, husband/farmer Wife; Mary 33
Children; Lillian 13, Florence 11 Marie 7 Lind H. 2



Writer's comments: Of all the bits of [Glendale](#) history that I have tried to record, none grieved me more than this story. I remember well the fear that gripped the [Glendale](#) community for some two weeks. Porch lights of most homes burned throughout the night. Shades were pulled and I was told by some residents of the area that they slept with their gun or guns at their side. A few homes had unused windows covered with plywood.

I had known Mr. and Mrs. Hughes all my life. They lived on a small farm which joined my Grandfather's farmland which we tended. They were neighbors and dear friends of our family.

Researched and written by;
[Clarence E. Crocker](#), September 2013

Editor's Note

This terrible crime not only terrified the [Glendale](#) area but also the other small towns nearby. My husband, Gerald Teaster, was four years old and living in [Pacolet Mills](#) when the crime happened. One of his earliest memories is about the excitement and fear people felt before the killer was caught. The event made a big impression on adults also. A few years ago he was scanning the items in his great aunt, Jessie Paige's photo albums. He found newspaper clippings she had saved about the crime along with several photos someone had taken of the house where the Petries had lived. The clippings and photos are shown on the following pages.

The following is part of the *Spartanburg Herald* article in Feb. 1942 about the gruesome murders and the arrest of the man who did it.

Negro Confesses In Brutal Hughes and Petrie Slayings

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moved. He embraced Sheriff Henry and Deputy Sheriff Brockman without saying a word, and then moved around the room patting other officers on the back.

The sheriff expressed his deep appreciation to all persons cooperating in the investigation of the Hughes and Petrie slayings.

"I especially wish to thank all of the members of the city police department, Sheriff Bryant and his deputies of Cherokee county, and Chief (of detectives) Frank N. Littlejohn and his men from the Charlotte police force," the sheriff said.

SHERIFF COMMENTS

"It's been a tough case, and we had mighty little to work on at first. But with a lot of hard work and wonderful cooperation, I am happy to be able to report that a full confession has been obtained in both the Hughes and Petrie slayings."

Sheriff Henry and other county authorities added, however, that some details of the confession were not quite satisfactory to them and that Jones would be subjected to much more questioning.

During preliminary questioning of Jones, a number of other officers who have been active in the investigation were present. They included Chief of City Detectives Hugh Taylor; W. S. Bryant, former chief of city detectives who emerged from retirement to aid in the probe because of his close friendship with Chief Chapman; County Officer George Goforth and others.

Later, the room was cleared of all questioning officers except Deputy Brockman and Chief Taylor.

Taking part in the arrest were: Sheriff Henry, Deputy Brockman, Chiefs Brady, Taylor and Bryant, County Officers Joe Balley, George Goforth, John Henry and Dick Souther, and County Detective George Pruette.

The arrest brought to a climax a wide man-hunt which was launched last Tuesday morning when the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Hughes, 67 and 65, respectively, were found in their farm home near Sloan's Grove church on the highway connecting the Charlotte highway from Fernwood farms and the Glendale-Clifton highway. Both elderly people had been hacked to death with their axe.

Officers immediately broadened their investigation of the Hughes' deaths to include those of Columbus Petrie, about 83, and Ida Petrie, about 72, who were found clubbed to death in their farm home near Ben Avon on Sunday, February 15, because of the many similarities of the cases. Maggie Petrie, about 75, and a sister of the two Petrie victims of the slayer, was found in the home with her dead brother and sister in a dazed semi-conscious state. She also had been the victim of a murderous assault.

Similarities Cited

Some of these similarities were:

1. The killer used weapons which were available on the scene.

2. Ida Petrie was left with her head on a pillow and so was Mr. Hughes.

3. Matches were found strewn about the interior of both homes when the bodies were discovered.

4. The victims' necks in all instances bore marks of having been strangled and lacerated with fingernails.

The Petrie slayings were discovered when Maggie Petrie roused sufficiently to reach the door and summon aid.

The Hughes deaths were discovered last Tuesday morning about 10:20 o'clock by Assistant Chief of Police B. B. Chapman, their son-in-law. A light pick-up truck, belonging to the Hughes and stolen by the killer, had been found on the Charlotte highway near Gaffney. Ownership was traced by Cherokee county officers who called Sheriff Henry.

The sheriff in turn called Chief Chapman who with Officer Nick Carter went to the Hughes home to tell them that their truck had been located. Finding the house locked, they broke in and discovered the bodies.

The photographs below were made of the Petrie home the day after the murder.

