

Preachers spreading a New Gospel Along A New Shore Sowed The Seed

# Of A Startling Crime In The Isolated Shore Community Of Pocasset

The Second Advent — the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ — which formed the prelude to the Pocasset murder, had begun two years earlier. Itinerant preachers spread the new gospel. They found willing listeners on Cape Cod. Many became converts. But these preachers of the new gospel began to speak so frantically at the Methodist meetings that ministers forbade them to speak there at all.

Converts to the new religion began dropping out of the Methodist flock. During the winter of 1877-78 a revival precipitated the real schism. Pocasset was an isolated community in the 70's. In the church was the only relaxation from the routine of farm life. Religion was a dominating community interest. There was stubborn resistance to the attack on traditional faith. There was fervent adoption of the new teaching.

The itinerant preachers moved on to other fields and new converts, perhaps reveling in the emotional upset they had brought to Pocasset and, of course, quite unconscious that they had sowed the seed for a startling crime. A band of 25 or 30 who had withdrawn from the Methodist church began to hold meetings in their own homes. Second Adventist feeling flourished because the community itself had produced a leader whose conviction and fervor exceeded even that of the evangelists.

Charles F. Freeman had experienced religion at 21. He

afterwards explained that he was "beat out of it by backsliding Christians." In Pocasset he had taught in the Methodist Sunday school, cared for the building, and rung the bell every Sunday. When he went out of the Methodist congregation with the other Second Adventists, he became zealous in his new belief. He told other members of the band that he was as far ahead of the Second Adventists as they were of other people.

Freeman was convincing in his self-assumed leadership. He was then 33, a man of pleasant, open countenance, and unflinching gaze. He was of medium height, with light complexion; his eyes were light blue. He was born in Highgate, Vt., and when only 15 had joined the Union army. He fought through the last four years of the Civil War and remained in the army for ten more years. Honorably discharged, he heeled shoes in Lynn for a time and moved to Pocasset in 1875 with his wife and children. There he bought a little home in Putts Hollow, near the present golf course. He farmed a little, and being a veteran, was given the job of carrying the mail between the depot and the post office.

Mrs. Freeman had been Hattie R. Ellis of Pocasset before her marriage in 1863. She was 32 this winter of the Second Coming excitement — a pale, rather colorless girl. Psychiatrists said later that she was under the complete domination of her husband and that her actions

were merely "a reflex of those of her husband."

The Freemans had three children. Lillian had died in 1872 at the age of two. Bessie Mildred was six. The baby, Edith Burgess Freeman, who was to die before her fifth birthday, was four.

## Felt The Call

Freeman progressed so rapidly in his leadership of the small band, that he soon began feeling the call to evangelism. He felt that he should go forth and carry the word to the world. His neighbors told of how, for ten days previous to May 1, 1879, he walked in a higher sphere, communing with the Lord.

Thunder without lightning foretold to him that the kingdom of God was coming upon the earth. At the same time he had an earthly cross to bear. The husband of Mrs. Freeman's sister came home from the sea to find that his wife had accepted the doctrine of the Second Coming. He did not like it. Mrs. Freeman was to testify in court long after.

## A Threat Made

He threatened to shoot my husband; it had great effect upon his nerves and troubled him greatly. My husband told me he had seen visions in one of which he heard voices. In another he had seen supernatural sights. For several days he

had not eaten anything. He spoke of the great burden he felt — such as Moses must have felt when he entered the temple.

Freeman knew that the Lord had appeared to him to sacrifice a member of his family, "to rudely awaken the world from its present condition." The distraught husband and father was waiting for the Lord to name the victim when the family retired as usual on the evening of April

30, 1879. The two little girls were put to bed after saying their prayers. Freeman said later they never seemed so dear to him as when he kissed them good night.

About two on the morning of

May 1, 1879, Freeman awoke from what he said afterwards had been sound sleep. His wife's final story was that he had not slept at all.

"The Lord appeared to me," said Freeman, "and informed me that the victim of the sacrifice was to be my pet, my idol, my baby Edith. I awoke my wife and we talked the matter over and prayed to the Lord for guidance and direction. The Lord said it was necessary."

## She Agreed

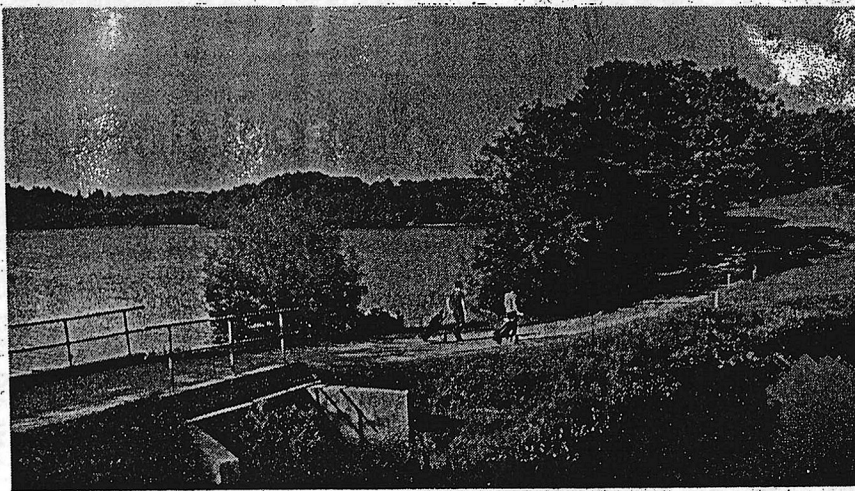
Freeman and his wife talked for half an hour. At first she objected, finally she agreed — a sample of what the psychiatrists called his domination of her. They then arose, kneeled by their bed, and prayed again.

The divine voice they listened for did not return. Freeman said later that he prayed, half hoping and half expecting that God would stay his hand at that final moment, as He did that of Abraham over Isaac of old. He prayed that if he were compelled to pursue the deed to the bitter end, that it might be done quickly. He prayed, he said, that death might come to the relief of the martyr at the first blow.

As he came to his decision, Freeman felt a great relief, as if a great load was raised from his mind. His wife, too, became convinced that their clear duty lay ahead; their duty to make a willing sacrifice to Heaven.

They arose from their prayers joyfully and dressed themselves, all the while singing praises of the Lord. In the dead of night, Freeman left the

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The Scenic Course Of The Cape Cod Country Club

The Ensign  
Salem, MA 22 May 1967

# After The Deed, Freeman

Continued

house, went outside to a small shed a few yards distant, and secured his large sheath knife. He returned to the bed chamber where awaited his wife. She lighted an oil lamp, held it high, and they entered the room in which the babies slept. Later accounts differed as to whether Mrs. Freeman held the lamp over the bed of the little one, or whether she rested it on a chair. At any rate the mother stood there, as the father walked to the side of the bed in which little Edith slept.

Drawing aside the coverlet, the father deliberately plunged the knife into Edith's side, just below the heart. "I raised my hand to strike the blow still believing the Lord would stay my hand but he did not," said Freeman. "The knife descended. My darling turned, as the knife struck her, lifting her hands and opening her eyes said, 'Oh papa.' My oldest child became awakened and was taken by my wife to our bed. I took the little victim of the Lord's into my arms and held her until she died. Then I went to bed with my dead darling."

Freeman said that he wept

bitterly. "It seemed as if God had deserted me as he did Jesus on the cross. But in the morning I felt gloriously."

Freeman sent notes to the faithful commanding them to a meeting at his home that afternoon when they would hear a revelation. Then he carried the morning mail from the station to the post office as usual.

How the gathering that afternoon heard the "revelation" is adequate testimony after half a century to the grip which the faith and Freeman had upon them. They heard the murder story from his own lips. They viewed the body of the sacrificial victim. No member of that group said a word to the police. The story of that meeting and the denouement of the crime is as unusual as its first chapter. Each unfolding development in the Pocasset murder is an odd contribution to the story of human character.

The little band of believers in the Second Coming gathered in the farmhouse in Putts Hollow, Pocasset, on the afternoon of May 1, 1879, in eager anticipation to hear the revelation that their leader had summoned them to hear. They thought they knew what the word would be, that Charles F. Freeman would tell them that God had insisted that he leave them and spread the gospel of Christ's Second Coming in other, less awakened communities.

## In The Parlor

Freeman welcomed them to the parlor. Mrs. Freeman was there. So was her mother, Mrs. Harriet Swift, and Alden P. Davis, a prominent figure among the Adventists and a storm center in the story that follows. Davis knew no more that he was entering the scene of murder than he could know that years later he was to be himself a murder victim in these same Cape Cod hills.

Freeman called the meeting

to order and remarked thought it best to dispel the usual singing and He told his auditors he regretted that outsiders unconverted were not to hear what he had to half an hour, content accounts relate, the fiercer held forth in generous discourse. Then them of the vision in which Lord had appeared directed him to kill his Edith as a sacrifice for the world. "I told the whole story and they did right," said Freeman his arrest.

## At First Disbelief

The Boston Globe said, "For a few moments the greatest consternation manifest. The visitors stounded and refused to believe it until their eyes and their consciences received acceptance."

One by one the company into the next room and body of Edith, who had led the night before a blow struck by her own while her mother looked on. This Mrs. Freeman what was reported in papers as "a few were dorseing everything he said." Others stood that everything must be by the will of the Lord. Freeman had only the command of God. The then separated.

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Woods Hole Yacht Club, the oldest in the area, was organized in 1896. The clubhouse is on Bar Neck Road, and racing is done in mirror dinghies and Knockabouts. Moise H. Goldstein, a summer resident, is the club's commodore.



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# After The Deed, Freeman Summoned The Faithful

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cious deed," remarked The Bos-  
ton Journal, "but they told no  
one, and went about their usual  
vocations."

## Suspicious

Only because young Con-  
stable Seth Redding went  
"sparking" to the home of Alden  
P. Davis that evening did arrest  
come quickly to Freeman. Red-  
ding thought the 16-year-old  
daughter of the Davis family  
was particularly serious. But no  
member of the family even  
hinted at the revelation of the  
afternoon. Redding and the  
daughter were finally left a-  
lone. The girl began to cry. Red-  
ding began to press her for the  
reason. After much persuasion  
he wrung from her the murder  
story.

Redding went from the Davis  
home to that of another of the  
group. The man confirmed the  
girl's story. Constable Redding  
went on to the Freeman home  
and waited outside until day-  
light. He must have spent a dis-  
traught night, for such a crime  
of violence in the innermost re-  
spectability of his own com-  
munity was not in the experi-  
ence of the young policeman.

## Would Rise Again

When Redding finally knock-  
ed on the door of the Putts Hol-  
low cottage, Freeman came  
forth and shook hands with him.  
The constable asked the  
murderer how he felt. Freeman  
replied that he didn't feel well.  
The constable remarked simply  
that he didn't wonder at that.  
"It's horrible," said Freeman  
and told the whole story. Red-  
ding gazed upon the body of lit-

tle Edith while the father told  
him he had done right in the  
sight of God, and that in three  
days little Edith would rise a-  
gain. Edith would then, said  
Freeman, go about with him,  
assisting him to spread the gos-  
pel. Mrs. Freeman, according to  
The Globe, "gazed rapturously  
at her husband as he recited the  
terrible tale." Three days—but  
in three days Freeman and his  
wife were in cells at Barnstable  
jail.

Constable Redding had no  
trouble whatever in arresting  
the mad parents. Alone, he took  
his buggy, picked up his prison-  
ers, drove to Monument and  
there caught the 6 P.M. train for  
Barnstable. As the train moved  
along, Freeman seemed in high  
spirits, singing and praying.

There were some 50 passen-  
gers on the train moving down  
from Boston to Barnstable.  
They knew nothing of the  
tragedy until Freeman kneeled  
upon his seat and, facing the  
back of the car with its audience

of travelers staring in surprise,  
burst into words. He again told  
his story and again asserted  
that baby Edith would be raised  
from the dead in three days or  
be translated bodily into  
heaven.

## Awoke The World

The Freeman case awoke the  
world, as Freeman expected,  
but not to its sense of wicked-  
ness. The world was horrified at  
what was then called the Pocas-  
set Murder. Newspapers thun-  
dered denunciations and  
printed columns and columns a-  
bout the case.

Dr. Munsell, the medical ex-  
aminer from Harwich, talked to  
Freeman at the jail and called  
the case more marvelous than  
any of a similar kind in medical  
books. He said neither Free-  
man nor his wife were insane  
but "in a morbid mental state,"  
convinced that God can and  
does talk directly to human  
beings."

Freeman said God had re-  
warded him by filling his soul



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