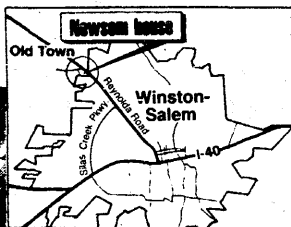
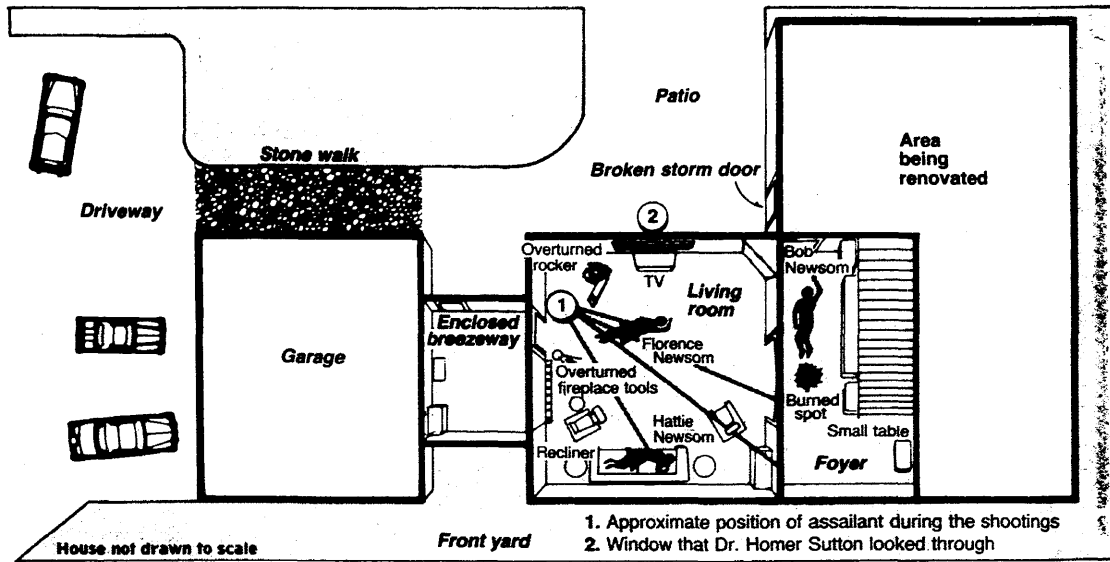


Old Town, N.C.



The Newsoms had been watching television together in their home, left, when the murderer opened fire



Keith Simmons/News & Record

'He's here in the hall,' the officer said. 'He's dead, too.'

(From A14)

thing. Workers kept tramping in and out — when they showed up.

But finally the end seemed in sight. Painters and flooring people were at work. Two more weeks should do it, Nana had been told. Bob and Florence were planning to move in at the end of June and leave their house in Greensboro to Rob and Alice and their three children, who'd been living with them for two years.

'Let's get out of here'

At about 10:20 Sunday night, May 19, Dr. Sutton slowly pulled up the driveway to Nana's house and saw three cars parked beside it. He recognized one as Bob Newsom's Buick and the blue Plymouth Fury and gold Plymouth Volare as Nana's. Like Nana, both of her cars were getting on in years.

Dr. Sutton and Katy got out. They had started to the back door, behind the garage, the door the family always used, when they saw that the glass in the storm door had been broken. Some of the pieces were on the step. That was odd. Nana wasn't one to leave broken glass lying around.

"Something bad has happened here," Dr. Sutton said.

He peeked into the window by the door, looking into the living room in the old part of the house. A lamp was on in one corner, and he could hear the TV playing just under the window.

Through the sheer curtains he saw Nana. She was in her nightgown, lying on a walnut-frame antique sofa upholstered in beige with tiny pink roses. A multicolored, hand-knitted afghan that she normally kept on the back of the sofa was pulled up around her chest. She seemed to be sleeping.

Then he saw Florence. She was lying on the floor on her right side, facing the TV. She was wearing a pink skirt, a pink and white knit top, no shoes. At first, Dr. Sutton thought she might be lying there watching TV, but that wasn't Florence's way. He looked closer.

"There's blood on the floor," he said. "Something has happened to them."

He couldn't see Bob. He tapped on the window. No response. Nana and Florence, he realized, were dead. Suddenly, he was struck by the notion that a murderer might still be inside the house.

"Let's get out of here," Katy said.

They got back in the car, drove across the street to F.L. Brownlee's house and asked to use the telephone. There appeared to be foul play at the Newsom's, they said. Homer Sutton dialed 911, told what he'd seen and gave the address. Then he called home and told his son, Steve, to call Rob in Greensboro and tell him to come.

Katy called Nana's minister at Bethabara Moravian Church, the Rev. John Giesler, to ask if Nana had been at church that evening. She hadn't, hadn't even been at morning services, and Giesler had been concerned, thinking she might be sick. He was shocked to learn why she hadn't been there.

The Suttons and Brownlee went across the street to wait for the police at the end of the Newsom driveway. After about 20 minutes, a car pulled up. It was Giesler. He and Brownlee went to the house and peered into the front living-room window. They returned to report that Florence had several wounds in her back.

Still no police came, and the group returned to Brownlee's house to call again. About 10 minutes later, a Winston-Salem city police car with a single officer arrived. The group went with him to the back door and told him Bob also should be in the house. After peeking into the window, he opened the storm door. A key was sticking in the lock of the entrance door. He opened the door and stepped inside.

"He's here in the hall," he called back. "He's dead, too."

She loved to laugh

To those who knew them, there could be no more unlikely murder victims than Hattie Newsom, her son and daughter-in-law.

Despite her age, Nana remained a vigorous woman, unpretentious and greatly beloved by community and family. Children loved to gather around to hear her tell stories, especially the ones about Little Abraham, a character she created to teach the lessons of life. Teenagers sought her advice, and dozens of people of all ages thought of her as their best friend.

Nana was cheerful. Always positive. Never critical or complaining. A little woman, just 5 feet 2, she loved to laugh. She and her daughter, Frances, always could find something to laugh about. If nothing else, they'd go to a clothing store and Nana would try on the most outrageous hat she could find just to giggle about it.

Nana still drove her old Plymouth and loved her independence. She was a strong believer in keeping busy. At Bethabara Moravian Church, where she was called Miss Hattie, she was one of the most active members. She'd taught a Sunday school class there for more than 40 years and rarely missed a Sunday. She was lead baker for the monthly chicken pie sales. She taught other women how to make traditional Moravian Christmas cookies. In 1984, the church honored her contributions with Hattie Newsom Day.

Nana also trimmed and finished beeswax candles for the Moravian Service League to sell at Old Salem, the restored Moravian village in downtown Winston-Salem. She tended a big organic garden every year, and she gave away and canned its bounty. When she found herself with time on her hands, she filled it with embroidery, decoupage, basketry, quilting — making gifts for family and friends.

Still, her family didn't like her living alone. That was why Bob and Florence had decided to move in. Bob

had spent most of his life in and around Winston-Salem, and he was looking forward to living there again.

Bob received a degree in industrial engineering at N.C. State University in 1943. Rejected for military service for being too thin during World War II, he joined the Merchant Marines and sailed in North Atlantic convoys. A gentle man, he would say later that he didn't mind being shot at for his country, but he was glad he never had to shoot at anyone. Near the end of the war, Bob went to Hanes High School to make a recruiting speech for the Merchant Marines and met Florence, a business teacher.

Florence was from a large and prominent family in Reidsville. Her father, James M. Sharp, started a small academy in Rockingham County, and her mother, Annie Blackwell, a Vance County native, came there to teach. After their marriage, James Sharp began practicing law in Reidsville. He became a well-known figure in the town, affectionately called Mr. Jim, and his popularity sent him to the state Senate.

Jim and Annie Sharp had a large family. Annie gave birth to 10 children, but three died in childhood. Another, Sally, died a young woman, leaving two small children.

The others were all achievers.

Susie, the eldest child, became a lawyer, joined her father in practice, involved herself in Democratic politics and was rewarded by being appointed the first female Superior Court judge in North Carolina. She became the first woman to be appointed as an N.C. Supreme Court justice and the first woman in America to be elected chief justice of a state supreme court.

Sally was born after Susie, and after Sally came Annie Hill, who got a degree in nursing at Duke University. She married a doctor, Fred Klenner, who was to become widely known for his controversial work with vitamin therapy. Another daughter, Louise, also became a nurse and a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy.

The eldest son, Tommy, became a chemical engineer, employed by defense contractors. The youngest child, James, became a Navy surgeon.

Florence, the next youngest child, went to what was then called Woman's College, later the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. After graduation, she taught high school for a year in Kings Mountain, then moved on to Hanes High in Winston-Salem.

After their marriage in 1945, Bob and Florence settled near Old Town, only a couple of miles from his parents. Bob went to work at R.J. Reynolds, and Florence taught at Old Town High School, later to be incorporated into North Forsyth Senior High, where she also would teach.

Their first child, Susie, was born in 1947. Four years later came Robert III, Rob. In 1950, Bob was promoted to chief industrial engineer for Reynolds, a position he held until 1968, when he took a job with the food division of Reynolds Industries in New York City. He and Florence moved to Connecticut, but they missed North Carolina and Bob missed the tobacco business.

In 1970, he joined Lorillard Corp. and returned to North Carolina as director of material and engineering services for the company's Greensboro cigarette plant. They bought a new two-story house with a big screened back porch on Fairgreen Drive in Hamilton Forest, an expensive subdivision just beginning to develop in northwest Greensboro. Florence returned to teaching at what is now Rutledge College, a business school in downtown Greensboro.

Bob was widely respected in his field. In 1971, he was elected president of the American Institute of Industrial Engineers, a group with more than 20,000 members. He soon was promoted to vice president at Lorillard and took charge of daily operations of the Greensboro plant.

He took civic responsibility seriously, belonged to many civic clubs, served on the board of visitors at Guilford College, was a trustee at the N.C. School for the Arts and a member of the executive committee of the General Greene Council of Boy Scouts. He'd headed Winston-Salem's Goodwill program and Greensboro's United Way campaign.

In 1975, seeking a less hectic pace, he left Lorillard and opened an office in the Law Building on Friendly Avenue as a consulting engineer.

A single word would leap to mind when friends and colleagues attempted to describe Bob: gentleman. He was soft-spoken, affable, easy-going, reassuring, a man of moderation in all things right down to his Republican politics. He loved few activities better than donning blue jeans and a floppy straw hat and putting around his yard for hours, mowing, raking, mulching his roses.

Florence was perfect counterpoint to Bob. She was more reserved, more proper, a gracious woman with a wry sense of humor. Her politics were her father's — old-time Democrat. She revered Franklin D. Roosevelt and wouldn't allow anyone to speak of him with disrespect. Strong-willed, she was more outspoken than Bob, never reluctant to speak her mind.

She took no guff from students. Yet students liked her. They seemed to sense that she loved her work and wanted them to succeed. She often went out of her way to help her students find jobs.

At 65, Bob had begun thinking of retirement. Near the end of 1984, he asked friends to help encourage Florence to retire. She did, reluctantly, but continued to teach one course for a while, just to help out the school, she said. She was 10 months older than Bob, had just turned 66 when she died.

'My house will serve the Lord.'

When Rob got the call telling him what Dr. Sutton had found at his grandmother's house, he and Alice were struck with fear. They turned on all the lights inside and out, checked locks on doors and windows, got out Rob's hunting rifle and

BITTER BLOOD A Genealogy of Murder

Today: The Dying Begins — Both murder scenes suggested robbery. Police suspected professionals. Family members suspected one of their own.

Monday: His Father's Son — Fritz Klenner's proud Prussian papa taught him to love guns, hate commies, charm women and expect Armageddon.

Tuesday: Susie Q. — Susie Lynch lived a fairy-tale youth: May Queen at 5, high school princess, fraternity sweetheart.

Wednesday: The Gathering Storm — Fritz was ready for the world to fall apart, but not for his father to die.

Thursday: Victims and Survivors — As the family arranged funerals, the detectives analyzed alibis.

Friday: A Spy Gets Spooked — Ian Perkins dreamed of joining the CIA. He thought he had passed the first test until the police came calling.

Saturday: The Bloody End — A shootout, a chase, an explosion — now nine people were dead.

Sunday: The Unraveling — The family was devastated, the community captivated. One by one, the bizarre details surfaced.

loaded it. They called close friends and neighbors and asked them to come over. They also called police and asked for a patrol to keep check on the neighborhood.

There had been trouble in the family, and they didn't want to take any chances on their own lives. If killers should be out to get them, they surely wouldn't approach a fully lighted house filled with people, Rob and Alice figured.

Rob called Raleigh to give the news to his father's sister, Frances, a former newspaper reporter who for years had been director of the N.C. Nurses Association. A close friend, Tom Maher, arrived. After Rob was sure his family was secure with friends and neighbors, he and Tom left for Winston-Salem.

Within minutes after the first police car arrived at the big house on Valley Drive, several others pulled up. The neighborhood seemed to swarm with them. Winston-Salem officers secured the scene before they realized the house was not in an area that recently had been incorporated into the city. The case, therefore, was the jurisdiction of the Forsyth County Sheriff's Department.

The first call to the sheriff's department went out at 11:48, and Larry Gordon, the first deputy to reach the house, got there at 11:57.

A minute later, Allen Gentry was awakened by a call at home. He was a fan of sports car racing and had spent the day at the Camel GT in Charlotte. He was tired when he got home and went to bed at 10:30. He got up quickly, dressed and drove to Valley Drive.

Even as a boy growing up in Elkin, Gentry knew what he wanted to be — a detective. Now 32, he was living his dream. He looked younger than his years, almost boyish, with closely trimmed hair and a shy but friendly manner. He'd gotten into law enforcement as a dispatcher with the Winston-Salem police. He joined the sheriff's department as a deputy in 1973 and became a detective five years later. Now he was a sergeant, a graduate of the FBI National Academy, a conscientious and thorough officer, proud of his work. He didn't mind being pulled out of bed in the middle of the night to look into a triple murder.

Gentry got to Valley Drive about the time his lieutenant, E.B. Hiatt, arrived. They went through the house together.

Entering the back door, they noticed that most of the glass from the broken storm door was between the two doors. Just inside to the right, an open doorway led to the hallway where Bob Newsom lay.

He was on his right side beside a dropleaf table next to the staircase, just outside the archway into the living room. He was wearing a plaid sport shirt, dress slacks and corduroy house slippers. He'd been shot three times in the abdomen, once in the right forearm (the only close shot) and once in the head. One of the shots in his abdomen had traveled upward, penetrating his heart, and was instantly fatal.

A big grandfather clock, one of Paw-Paw's most prized possessions, stood near Bob's head. On the floor beside it was a small, wood-encased wall clock parked in the hallway because of the renovations. On top of the wall clock, there was an empty shell from a .45-caliber pistol.

The contents of Florence's pocketbook had been dumped beside Bob's body.

In the living room, Gentry saw that a struggle had taken place.

A wooden rocker was on its side between the television and the doorway leading to an enclosed breezeway where Nana had moved her refrigerator and put a hot plate so she could cook while her kitchen was being redone.

A set of fireplace tools was overturned.

The foot rest of a green recliner where Florence obviously had been sitting was still up. A bowl of grapes she'd been eating sat on a marble-topped table beside the chair. On the floor by the chair, her shoes were neatly aligned.

Florence's throat had been slit. She had two shallow stab wounds in the right side of her neck, one in the right shoulder. There were three deep stab wounds in the middle of her back. One had severed the aorta. A shot in the chest penetrated both lungs, liver and heart. She, too, had been shot in the head.

Florence's wedding band was bent and her finger cut beneath it, as if somebody had tried to remove the ring. Her diamond engagement ring was missing.

Nana had been shot three times. One bullet, apparently a wild shot, grazed the left side of her head. A second hit her in the lower right side. The fatal shot struck her right temple, passed through her head and lodged in her left shoulder.

Nana's hands were folded beneath her chin, as if she had been praying when she was shot. On the wall above the sofa where she lay was a framed antique needlepoint quote from Joshua: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

One bullet had passed through the flower-patterned easy chair where Bob apparently had been sitting watching TV. That bullet also passed through a corner of an ornate whatnot behind the chair before lodging in the wall. Another shot struck a piece of molding on the far side of the stairway and plopped back onto the steps. Clearly, most of the shots had been fired from near the breezeway door.

In the hallway, six inches from Bob's feet, a burned spot about 30 inches wide marred the olive green carpet. The carpet had burned through and the floorboards beneath had been charred before the fire extinguished itself.

A small table, another orphan of the remodeling, stood by the burned spot. Its open drawer apparently had supplied some of the fuel — bits of pages from an organic gardening magazine were in the ashes.

In Nana's bedroom on the other side of the hallway, drawers had been pulled from a chest and stacked on the floor. Drawers also were stacked in an upstairs bedroom that Nana once had used, the bedroom where pictures of her two children and five grandchildren decorated the walls.

In another upstairs bedroom, the one Bob and Florence used every weekend, Bob's briefcase was found open on the floor by a washstand. On the stand was a rose-adorned china urn that Paw-Paw had brought home one day wrapped as a gift for Nana.

"What in the world am I supposed to do with that?" she had asked.

"Well, I don't know," he'd replied, "but I'll bet you've got the prettiest chamber pot of any woman in Forsyth County."

The briefcase was empty except for a calculator and some pens.

Gentry took note of that. Had papers been taken from it?

Clearly, this was something other than a robbery. On the floor in Nana's bedroom, a heavy gold and pearl bracelet worth hundreds of dollars had been left in clear view. In the living room, \$500 in cash was clearly visible in a glass dish on a whatnot shelf. An income tax refund check was propped beside it.

Gentry took charge of the case. He told his lieutenant that he wanted help from the State Bureau of Investigation, and calls went out to an SBI lab team and to SBI agent Tom Sturgill.

Sturgill was older than Gentry, tall, thin, balding, taciturn, a former Highway Patrol trooper with more than 20 years in law enforcement. The two had been on many cases together and enjoyed working with each other.

Sturgill arrived about 2 a.m. Shortly afterward, Gentry went across the street to the Brownlee house, where Rob had been waiting with his in-laws, Dr. Sutton and his parents' minister since about 12:30. Rob was shaken. Gentry asked him only for basic information about his parents and what they had been doing that weekend.

Almost as an afterthought, Rob mentioned that his sister Susie's former mother-in-law and sister-in-law had been murdered some time last year in Kentucky. Gentry told Rob to go on home, that he'd talk to him in more depth later.

On the way home, Rob and his friend Tom talked about who might have killed his parents and grandmother. By the time they got to Greensboro, Rob thought he knew the identity of the murderer — his first cousin, Fritz Klenner.

Jerry Bledsoe, 44, is a senior writer and columnist for the News & Record. He is a two-time winner of the national Ernie Pyle Memorial Award and has won several N.C. Press Association awards, including first-place awards for column writing, spot news reporting and investigative reporting. A native of Thomasville and an Army veteran, Bledsoe worked for the Greensboro Daily News, the Louisville Times in Kentucky and The Charlotte Observer before returning to the News & Record in 1981. He is the author of five books.



Bledsoe