



Historical Media Coverage

Detective remembers tracking murder clues

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On Oct. 16, 1955, James Jack, an ambitious, 26-year-old Chicago police detective, and his partner had just returned to the old 33rd District police station — later remembered as the Jefferson Park 16th District — at 5430 W. Gale St., to wrap up for the night after working the 4 p.m. to midnight shift.

A man, who identified himself as Malcolm Peterson, came into the station to ask for help. It was 11:20 p.m. Peterson said his 13-year-old son Robert had gone to a movie downtown that afternoon with two friends, brothers John Schuessler, 13 and Tony Schuessler, 11. Peterson was clearly worried about the boys.

"I had a gut feeling," Jack said last week, standing near the front steps of the Cook County Criminal Courts Building. Forty-seven years after the boys disappeared, Kenneth Hansen had just been sentenced to 200 to 300

years in the murders of the three boys.

"Usually we don't take missing reports (right away)," Jack said. "We wait 24 hours. There was something here. Kids don't just disappear off the face of the earth. And the way this parent was, he was so shook up, and I knew that something was legitimate here."

Instead of ending his shift and going home, Jack and his partner went out to search for the boys. They went downtown to check the movie houses and looked up and down Milwaukee Avenue. It had been raining all night. They returned to the station about 1:30 a.m. There was no sign of the boys.

Jack turned the information over to the detectives who were on duty for the next shift along with a description of the Peterson and Schuessler boys, and went home. He told them to call him right away in the morning.

"I was quite disturbed myself," Jack said. "I didn't sleep all night."

It was Jack who called instead, early Oct. 17. He talked to Sgt. George Murphy, who was in charge of all of the detectives assigned to the district at the time. Murphy said police had not come up with anything yet.

Jack went straight to the police station where he was joined by his partner. They went to work right away, interviewing everyone they could to get information on where the boys could possibly be.

They went to Farnsworth School, 5414 N. Linder Ave., where the boys were students, to talk to teachers and staff. Jack interviewed the parents of all three boys countless times, trying to get even the smallest hint on where they might have gone. He and other detectives worked through the day.

Their first break in the case came Monday night. Ernest Niewiadomski told police that he had seen the three boys at the Monte Cristo bowling alley, 3325 W. Montrose Ave. (Continued on page 6)

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about 7:30 p.m. the night before. Niewiadomski said the boys told him they had gone to see "The African Lion" at the Loopy Theater and were on their way home.

They also asked Niewiadomski for some money, but he did not have any. Niewiadomski's sisters were paying his way. Robert, Tony and John had left home with only \$4 between them. The three had also gone to the Drake Bowl, 3550 W. Montrose Ave., but did not stay long for the same reason.

Jack got the numbers of the bus routes that served the area and began asking questions in an effort to retrace the boys' steps. He worked on the case until about 2 a.m. Oct. 18.

After refusing to work later in the morning, Jack learned that the mayor and the police commissioner were getting concerned about the

case. Uniformed police officers were brought in to take part in the search.

Jack and his partner went to interview the boys' parents again to see if they could come up with anything new about where the boys might have gone.

Jack also found out that the boys took a bus on Montrose Avenue and got off at Kenneth Avenue. They had walked to Milwaukee Avenue and took a Milwaukee Avenue bus. They got off at Lawrence Avenue. The boys were later seen hitchhiking at the intersection about 8:30 p.m. Witnesses told police that Tony was out on the street with his thumb out while Robert and John waited off to the side. The trail went cold from there.

Jack said it is his theory that Hansen picked up the boys and took them to the Idle Hours Stables, at East River

and Higgins roads. Jack believes that Hansen took them to an equipment room and told the two older boys they could ride horses in the arena.

In Jack's reconstruction of the crime, Hansen molested Tony, who cried out for help. John walked in and threatened to tell his parents or call police. Hansen punched John in the Adam's apple, immobilizing him, and strangled Tony. Robert Peterson discovered what happened and ran to get help. In the meantime Hansen choked John and then went after Robert.

The boys' unclothed bodies were dumped in a ditch near a parking area in Robinson Woods, just south of Lawrence Avenue between East River Road and the Des Plaines River. A salesman named Victor Livingston discovered the bodies about 12:15 p.m. Oct. (Continued on page 7)



Detectives Fred Koeppe (left), Frank Schutze (second from left) and James Jack (right) inspect the site where the bodies of Bobby Peterson and Tony and John Schuessler were found with Peterson's father Malcolm (under arrow). The boys were killed 47 years ago this month.

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18. Jack was ordered to the scene. When he got there, Cook County Sheriff's police, representatives of the Cook County Coroner's office and other investigators were there examining the bodies and looking for clues.

A Special Investigations Unit was set up to research the crime. There were as many as 70 police officers and detectives assigned to the unit. Police questioned everyone they could. Detectives spoke to thousands of people, from individual students at Farnsworth School to sailors in the Merchant Marine.

Jack said he went to the Idle Hours Stables at least once. He believes one of the first people he ran into was Kenneth Hansen. No one suspected Hansen at the time.

Over the next few years Jack would go to movie theaters downtown and anywhere else the trail would take him. He even went undercover as a pin setter at the Monte Cristo in an effort to solve the case.

A few months after the bodies were discovered, police decided to exhume them to see if there were any clues they had missed.

"Just prior to exhuming the bodies, a barn burned down at the Idle Hours," Jack said. "I feel that if anything was in

that barn, any evidence that could have been used to solve the case, was destroyed."

Police took thousands of telephone tips and gave every sex offender taken into custody a polygraph test, to see if any of the arrestees had any knowledge about the Peterson-Schuessler murders.

The Special Investigations Unit was dissolved in 1963-3, after Orlando W. Wilson was named police superintendent. Wilson also reconfigured district boundaries. Jack went to Harrison Area (4) headquarters. Although the unit was dissolved, many detectives continued working on the case murders.

"We were just really frustrated about the whole thing. The city was still in an uproar."

"I start thinking about it and start going over my old records. I just knew deep in my heart that (Hansen) was the guy. He lived his life like nothing happened. He took out three kids just for his sexual fantasy. It was either him or them. I still see it, I still feel it and I'm glad it's over."

Jack, a former Edison Park resident, has written a book about the crime, "Three Boys Missing," with co-author Michael Panni, an attorney. He added a few pages in the wake of Hansen's sentencing. The book is set to be released.