

JACOB S. HARDEN: POOR BOY, MORAL MONSTER, MALIGNANT SOUL
by Janet R. Stafford

Preface

The trial and execution of the Rev. Jacob S. Harden can be found in newspaper accounts and a lone pamphlet. Working with these sources is like putting together an old jigsaw puzzle -- some of the pieces are there, others are missing. What has emerged is an incomplete, but intriguing picture -- intriguing, not because the murder of Harden's wife was particularly horrible nor because his motive was shocking. The picture is curious because of the way Harden was portrayed by media of his day. He had been a highly successful young preacher (a probationer in the newly-organized Newark conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church). After his trial and execution, he was perceived as either a penitent sinner or a heartless monster, depending upon which newspaper covered the story. Of the four sources, the local ones were the kindest, if only because they remained silent about his motives and personality. The further away the newspaper was from Warren County, however, the more Harden was portrayed as a monster.

The Basic Plot

Jacob Harden was born in Blairstown, Warren County, N.J. on May 11, 1837. Accounts of his life indicate that his talents for writing, speaking and leadership made themselves apparent during his school years. At age eighteen, he felt called into the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church but, at the advice of his pastor, took a job teaching school for a year in Stillwater Township, Sussex County. During this time, he also received a license to exhort. In 1856, several pastors suggested that he take a position as a colporteur in Hunterdon County, traveling, visiting families, selling books and dispensing tracts. While he was still engaged in selling books door to door, the presiding elder of the Rahway District invited the nineteen-year-old Harden to serve as a supply preacher at Mt. Lebanon Mission, near Anderson, N.J. The church was in dire need. It had been without a pastor for about six months, was no longer part of the Clinton Circuit, and had been "demoted" to mission status.

Harden quickly discovered that Mt. Lebanon was divided, thanks to a disagreement among the congregation's officials. He attempted to heal wounds, but found the problems too deep to handle and decided instead to concentrate on building the church up. He was, from all accounts, a good preacher who had a flair for leading revivals and who was popular with female parishioners. As a result, church attendance and membership began to grow. Annual Conference minutes for 1857 (the year that Harden was admitted to the Conference on trial) show that Mt. Lebanon Mission had a total membership of 40.¹ The next year, with its membership at 110 and Harden continuing on probation, Mt. Lebanon's mission status was removed.²

¹ *Minutes of the Annual Conference of the M.E. Church, for the Year 1857* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857) 261.

² *Minutes of the Annual Conference of the M.E. Church, for the Year 1858* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1858) 55.

In 1856, Harden made the acquaintance of a parish family named Dorland. He was invited to visit their home and claimed that Mrs. Dorland had been disappointed that he had not met their daughter, Hannah Louisa (usually called Louisa). A few weeks later, Louisa introduced herself to Harden at church. He did not visit the family again until New Year's Eve, 1856. According to Harden's short autobiography, the family went off to bed and left him alone with Louisa for an hour and a half, until he finally went to bed himself. A short time after the beginning of the new year, the Dorlands told him that Louisa wanted to visit Blairstown. Harden offered to drive her there (since his family lived in the town), and then ended up bringing her home. It is unclear what passed between the two young people, but rumors, allegedly started by Mrs. Dorland, began to circulate that the couple were engaged to be married.

Harden had clearly broken the rules, since clergy were supposed to keep themselves above impropriety. A ministerial etiquette book, written later in the century, cautions young pastors to be discreet and careful.

Do not become a *beau*. Indulge in no private interviews, or clandestine correspondence. If visiting a young lady with the view of paying your addresses for marriage, let her parents see you 'as open as the day.' Let others 'see her home'..... Never flirt. Be no candidate for the universal admiration of young ladies.³

By staying unchaperoned with Louisa Dorland, taking her to and from Blairstown, corresponding with her, and by indulging in friendships with other women, Jacob Harden was breaking the rules and setting himself up for scandal.

Despite the rumors, Louisa and Jacob continued to see each other regularly until late fall, at which time her father began to demand that Harden marry his daughter. When the pastor refused, claiming that he was too young, too poor and in debt, he was threatened with prosecution (probably for breach of promise). The rumors about the couple intensified. One story was that Louisa had been pregnant and miscarried. In the spring of 1858, the Dorlands released a formal, written contract clearing Harden of any misbehavior, with the understanding that the couple would marry within the year. Harden agreed to the deal, and the couple wed in October of 1858.

None of the accounts are clear regarding the precise cause of the couple's marital problems; however, the two did not live together at the boarding house where Harden was staying. Louisa chose instead to live with her parents and to pay visits to her husband. Trial proceedings indicated that the marriage did not seem to be a happy one. Louisa was reportedly depressed much of the time, and both she and Jacob seemed to have been in poor health.

In the early spring of 1859, Louisa came to the Ramsey home (where Harden was boarding) for a visit while the landlord was out of town. While she was there, Harden began poisoning her food with arsenic. In his confession, he claimed that he did it for three days, then

³ Howard Henderson, *Ethics and Etiquette of the Pulpit, Pew, Parish, Press and Platform* (Covington, Ky.: H.A. Schroetter, Publisher, 1892) 26-27.

had a change of heart. However, the very next day, during a trip to Easton, Pennsylvania, he visited a fortune teller, who told him that his wife would not live long. This information apparently encouraged him to purchase more arsenic and as well as some laudanum. When Harden returned home, he began to poison Louisa once more. She died a few days later, on March 9, 1859.

When it became clear that Louisa Harden's death was of a suspicious nature, an inquest was called, and the body exhumed for autopsy. At first, it was believed that her death was a suicide. However, until it could be positively ascertained that Louisa had taken her life with her own hand, Harden was a suspect. On the advice of friends, the young pastor left town and, taking a circuitous route, ended up in Fairmount, Virginia, where he assumed a new name and took a job. It is difficult to tell from the accounts precisely how long Harden was in hiding, but a warrant for his arrest and a reward for his capture were issued. Harden was eventually tracked down, arrested and sent to Belvidere, New Jersey, where he stood trial, was found guilty and finally was executed on July 6, 1860.

Murder Narratives and Execution in the Nineteen Century

Since the Harden sources are murder narratives, it is helpful to understand how the genre developed and what it attempted to do. Karen Halttunen's essay, "Early American Murder Narratives," states that during the second half of the eighteenth century, a shift occurred in written accounts about murders. Up to that point, executions had been public and were occasions at which the local clergy preached sermons about original sin and the need for repentance. The gap between the condemned and the crowd was perceived as being very narrow, and the murderer represented the consummate sinner in need of repentance. Because all those present shared the taint of human sin, the spectators were supposed to understand that anyone among them could commit murder. Hence, execution sermons were designed to help the community acknowledge personal and corporate sin, and recognize the transcendence of repentance.⁴

After 1750, other forms of murder narratives began to arise, among them first-person accounts by the murderer (who often refused to accept the role of representative sinner) and the trial report. These materials usually had a greater interest in violence, lurid details, and the murderer's social environment. Moreover, both literary forms had little in the way of traditional theological grounding and therefore did not explain the murder in terms of universal human depravity. Instead, they focused on the murderer's character, the motive, and the perpetrator's inability to control the passions. Unfortunately, not all murders could be explained that way -- especially if the murderer acted out of character, felt compelled to kill, or was simply cold-blooded -- and this challenged Enlightenment concepts about the impact of environment on one's character, the transcendent power of human reason, and the existence of an innate, moral sense.⁵

⁴ Karen Halttunen, "Early American Murder Narratives: The Birth of Horror," *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History*, Ed. Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) 67-73.

⁵ Halttunen, "Early" 76-83.

"Confronted with this intellectual bind," Halttunen writes, "many narrators, including some murderers writing in the first-person, had recourse to an understanding of the murderer as monster, a terrible aberration from normal human nature."⁶ Hence, the murderer became, not a member of the community and an example of a shared sinful nature, but an alien -- something completely Other and an affront to decent human sentiment.

In attempting to understand the Harden texts, it is helpful to have some background regarding executions. Louis P. Masur points out that, during the early nineteenth century, public executions were replaced by private executions.⁷ What had once been "a display of civil and religious authority and order,"⁸ was now shunned by the upper and middle classes, who did not believe that public executions could deter the criminally-minded and were fearful that large crowds would turn into mobs and disrupt personal and economic life.⁹

Additionally, Masur notes that early-to-mid-nineteenth century concerns about hypocrisy caused people to question appearances. As a result, last-minute conversions and penitence, once been central to rites of execution, now were so suspect that they no longer had any value in that setting.¹⁰

By the mid-nineteenth century, executions were private, viewed only by a select, invited group. However, the public was present through newspaper reports which carried graphic accounts of trials and hangings. Such emotionally-charged material, now read in the privacy of the parlor, gave the upper-to-middle class reader the feeling that justice had been carried out within the aegis of a stable, consensual society.¹¹

The *Easton Evening Express* and *The New-York Times'* treatment of the Harden case illustrate Halttunen's theory. In light of any reasonable explanation for his act of murder, Harden was declared a monster. The material also demonstrates Masur's theories about perceived consensus (there is a "justice has been done" feel to the writing) and detailed reporting for private consumption. *The New-York Times* articles also illustrate nineteenth-century upper-to-middle-class fears and suspicions of crowds.

The Warren Journal and the booklet, *Life, Confession, and Letters of Courtship of Rev. Jacob S. Harden*, however, do *not* fit Halttunen's theory about murder narratives. For one thing, they refrain from making judgments about Harden's personality. Both sources maintain an intriguing silence, choosing to present data only and leave the interpretation up to the reader.

"This Poor Boy" -- *The Warren Journal* Articles

Jacob Harden was a "local boy," born in Blairstown, Warren County, which may account the lack of interpretation regarding his character in the *Journal*.

⁶ Halttunen, "Early" 83.

⁷ Louis P. Masur, *Rites of Execution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 93-94.

⁸ Masur 26.

⁹ Masur 96-102.

¹⁰ Masur 105-108

¹¹ Masur 111-116.

The largest article is "Trial of Rev. Jacob S. Harden, for the Murder of His Wife, Hannah Louisa Harden." Covering two full pages and half of a column on the third page, it curiously opens with Jacob and Louisa's courtship letters, which had been presented as trial evidence.

According to Karen Lystra, nineteenth-century love letters must be understood in terms of a public/private continuum: "Sex, romantic love, and all the intimate communication of lovers (single and married) fall on the extreme end of privacy.... Private words were written and read in private places, reflecting the crucial relationship between words and space."¹²

One therefore wonders why something so exceedingly private would be revealed, not only to family and friends, but to the eyes of the public both at the trial and in the papers. Part of the answer may lie in the fact that, according to Victorian standards, the letters did not seem to be normal. Lystra notes that "the opening form of address often indicated the level of intimacy between correspondents" and that the evolution of pet names over the course of correspondence were most often an indicator of familiarity.¹³ Jacob and Louisa's openings and closings generally remain formal. In fact, the only evidence of warm address occurs in Jacob's letter of September 2, 1858 (just six weeks away their wedding), when he refers to Louisa as "Dear Friend."¹⁴

Lystra indicates that closings also exhibited the same growth of intimacy.¹⁵ However, once again, the Harden letters do not conform. The exception is Harden's September 2 letter, which he signed "Yours affectionately" and Louisa's letter of April 16, 1858, which she signed "Your friend."¹⁶

While nineteenth-century American lovers usually "energetically articulated their emotional ties with each other" and, among upper-to-middle class writers of both sexes, emotions were explosive and rich with metaphor,¹⁷ the major emotions found in Louisa's correspondence are jealousy and accusation:

I think, by what people say, you are enjoying yourself in one place where there are three girls. I heard, you read that paper [the release clearing Harden of misrepresentation] four times at the place where the waist-ribbon was picked out.... What makes you think we all have become your enemies? God knows my love has been great; I put all the confidence in you any one could, and now nothing but trouble for me.¹⁸

¹² Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 17.

¹³ Lystra 19.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Trial" 2.

¹⁷ Lystra 20.

¹⁸ "Trial" 1.

Harden's letter's, meanwhile, seem defensive.

You speak of placing all confidence in me. Do your actions show it, when you believe every one else in preference to me. Again, when I told you the consequence of bringing about what you are endeavoring to do, you did not regard it.... Can I believe you have any confidence in me, when, after I told you the fearful consequence of my marrying while on the circuit, yet you appear to have no regard for the future part of my life.¹⁹

Lystra writes that nineteenth-century romantic love generally evinced an obsession with the writer's inner state, and usually included self-disclosure to the loved one, self-criticism which the loved one countered with positive responses, immersion with the other's inner self, and swings between the heights of bliss and the depths of pain.²⁰ The difficulty with the Harden correspondence is that, while pain and struggle is quite evident, there is no joy, nor is there an effort on either writer's part to be positive with the other. They seem mainly to criticize and accuse each other. Louisa pouted ("How do you think I feel when you don't live up to your promises?"²¹) and was never happy, while Jacob complained about his health and seemed to blame Louisa for the rumors ("If you had not been so fast last spring, things would not have been as they are"²²).

With such an obviously difficult relationship, it is strange that the couple continued to write to each other. Perhaps the fact that the relationship was so strained, coupled with their pursuit of each other (especially Harden's pursuit of Louisa), is why the letters were used as court evidence. It is difficult to say at this point.

The next section of the "Trial" article reports the court proceedings, including testimony by witnesses and statements by lawyers. The defense tried to claim that Louisa died by her own hand, and brought forth people to testify to her melancholy, jealousy and family history of suicide. Medical experts were even called up to prove that the tendency to commit suicide could be inherited. Defending lawyers claimed that the young woman=s jealousy and depression excited a predisposition to suicide.

The defense also claimed that Jacob Harden was a proper husband. How could he not be? "The prisoner was no stranger cast here among us, but was a child of old Warren, reared here among her green hills, and could they, by a verdict of theirs, say that she had given birth to a monster?"²³ The lawyers for the defense also pointed out that Harden had no clear-cut motive nor did he show signs of criminality: "Men do not become great criminals at once, unless there is some motive which rises up in before their poor weak mind which they cannot resist. Where is

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lystra 31-53.

²¹ Trial 1.

²² Ibid.

²³ "Trial" 1.

the down hill road which this prisoner traveled."²⁴ In addition, they claimed that Harden was appropriately bereaved at Louisa's death and appealed to middle-class assumptions, still at large in the mid-nineteenth century, that perfect sincerity and transparency of character was a possibility.²⁵

When it was found that she was dying, he manifested all the feeling that a husband would exhibit at the death of a wife. Do you suppose that if he had been the cause of her death he would have wept any but hypocritical tear. The feelings of the heart will be uppermost and cannot be concealed.²⁶

The prosecution, meanwhile, emphasized Harden's duplicity with Louisa and his appetite for other women:

He had gratified his purposes with her at an early day upon the promises of marriage by his own confession. Having done so he left her and addressed himself to other ladies. In the depth of her trouble she revealed the fact to her parents and to cover up her shame they urged the marriage.²⁷

The prosecuting attorneys played upon urban middle-class fears of confidence men who, to quote Halttunen, "could sever the connection between inner character and outward appearances by consciously manipulating the impression he made on others."²⁸ A preacher, especially one with a silver tongue, could conceivably deceive friends, family, even his colleagues, for nefarious purposes: "...surrounded by all the restraining circumstances of a clergyman of the M. E. Church, he almost revelled in deception and falsehood."²⁹ The prosecution then identified Harden's monstrous nature.

If this defendant is guilty it is one of the most aggravated cases of murder known in the annals of crime. It was committed on a beautiful young unoffensive woman, in the flower of life, and budding womanhood, by a minister of the gospel. He who could stand by her bedside under such circumstances and see her die inch

²⁴ "Trial" 2.

²⁵ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) 52.

²⁶ "Trial" 2.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Halttunen, *Confidence* 42.

²⁹ "Trial" 2.

by inch under his hand, must have rather the fierceness of the tiger than a man, and is beyond the pale of human sympathy.³⁰

The proceedings are given by the reporter without commentary. The article then shifts to the verdict and the sentencing, and closes with letters that Harden wrote to his father regarding his long engagement and marriage.

I commenced an extra effort last Wednesday by having service in the grove. We have eight penitent seekers and two persons have been convicted. The prospect is most glowing. It bids fair for a most glorious revival. If the meeting should continue to increase in interest up to the time of my wedding I will not have my home bringing until some time after; but if the interest should abate I will be home about the first of November. I expect to be married the 26th of October, by Brother Herr..."³¹

A letter from Louisa to her brother, written after the marriage, is also included: "...Mr. Harden has got father's horse to drive now, for it is stronger than his, but his begins to look fine; I go to the barn and look at Lucy when I cannot see Mr. Harden...."³²

There is something ironic about these letters coming at the end of the trial report: Harden was enthusiastic about his career, Louis was girlishly missing her husband. One moment they were young and with the future before them, and the next their future had vanished. The placement of the material could have been a commentary on the uncertainty of human happiness, or it simply could have been a last-minute addition to the story. Once again, however, the reporter does not interpret the data.

The Warren Journal also carried an account of Harden's execution. Although Harden is described as "perfectly composed and self-possessed" the night before his execution and reportedly viewed the scaffold "without tremor or the slightest show of emotion," the *Journal* seems sympathetic, if not unabashedly romantic, in its description of his last moments:

Harden stood unflinchingly erect, muttering 'God have mercy upon me! Lord Jesus save me in Heaven!' Then for an instant... he looked firmly and silently in the dark face of death, standing alone upon the shore of that wide ocean of eternity, beneath whose waves he was soon to sink. The white handkerchief [which he was to release to signal the executioner] fluttered like a wounded bird to

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Trial" 3.

³² Ibid.

the ground, the drop fell with a dull thud, the spectators recoiled and closed their eyes...³³

When criticism is leveled, it is not at Harden, but at the crowds of females who attended the execution: "What can be the feelings of any woman who would wish to witness the horrors of an execution, we cannot imagine."³⁴ Also, although the reporter does not seem particularly uneasy about the huge crowd, he or she is critical of the group's behavior because they "lost all sense of reverence, and with shouting and laughter, eagerly pressed towards the hearse," then rushed to see the gallows.³⁵ Lastly, the reporter was indignant about the fact that Harden was denied burial in the Blairstown Church cemetery ("as if a murderer's dust shared a murderer's guilt and would contaminate the earth."³⁶) but was interred instead in an adjacent field.

This is a refinement of cruelty of which Harden's family, who have always been respected in the neighborhood, are not deserving. Thus shut out from human sympathy and companionship alike in life and death, this poor boy, a waif thrown by fate amid the slime of life's ocean, will sleep in his narrow house....³⁷

It seems quite probable that the local paper was unwilling to label Harden as a monster because he was a member of the community. Many people knew him and his family. The case was simply too close to home. In fact, the ministers and churches who worked to effect Harden's repentance were commended for their efforts. Perhaps, because the Warren County newspaper and community could not understand why Harden murdered his wife, they chose to remain silent about his motives and chose to focus on reintegrating him as a penitent, confused "poor boy."

No Comment -- *Life, Confession, and Letters of Courtship*

The *Life, Confession and Letters of Courtship* book also lacks commentary. At first glance, it appears to be a form gallows literature. During the eighteenth century, this genre "contained the lives, last words, and dying confessions of a criminal and were sold on execution day and circulated throughout the community."³⁸ Last words and confessions were meant to warn members of the community, especially the young, to attend to the moral lessons embodied by the criminal's execution and to encourage adults to set good examples for their children

³³ "Execution of Jacob S. Harden," *The Warren Journal* 18 July 1860: 2.

³⁴ "Execution," *Journal* 2.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Masur 33.

(which the young were expected to follow).³⁹ By the nineteenth century, however, gallows literature as a separate genre was replaced by detailed and lengthy newspaper accounts.⁴⁰

Harden's trial had a great deal of press coverage, so why was the book produced? *The Warren Journal* notes that Harden made a written confession when the Court of Pardons refused to reduce his sentence to life imprisonment.⁴¹ Both the *New-York Times* and the *Journal* say that Harden then gave the confession to his father in the hope that its publication would financially benefit his poverty-stricken family.⁴²

Crudely put, the book seems to have been a merchandising scheme. While it contains the same type of materials as gallows literature -- Harden's life told in his own words, his confession, an affidavit attesting to its validity, and the courtship letters -- it has little moralizing. Its introduction even states that:

We do not affirm or deny that Harden may or may not have been a man given over to licentiousness -- he is now before the Judge of all the Earth, who knoweth the hearts of men, and who alone can judge him rightly; but the reader will perceive that the confession, which is brief, contains no allusion of the nature referred to; nor can we hear from any reliable source that he has acknowledged any such, either orally or in writing⁴³.

Thus, the book appears to have been printed by friends mainly to help ease the Harden family's poverty.

In the text, Harden portrays himself as a young man forced into a marriage by Louisa's overbearing mother (who continued to trouble the couple even after they were married). One would expect him to go into details about their marriage. However, he actually seems to be more interested in writing about his success at Mt. Lebanon.

At the end of his life story, Harden does express penitence: "I feel and know that I have had a fair trial, and have been justly condemned; and that it is meet and right I should die for I feel my life is really forfeited. I have committed a high crime, both against the laws of God and man."⁴⁴ Additionally, "My fate is a word of warning to professed Christians, and especially to the young, and to mothers who are seeking eligible marriages for their daughters."⁴⁵ But about

³⁹ Masur 34-36.

⁴⁰ Masur 114.

⁴¹ "Case of Jacob S. Harden," *The Warren Journal* 29 June 1860: 2.

⁴² "Harden's Confession," *The Warren Journal* 18 July 1860: 2; "The Confession of Harden," *The New-York Times* 3 July 1860: 2.

⁴³ *Life, Confession, and Letters of Courtship of Rev. Jacob S. Harden, of the M. E. Church, Mount Lebanon, Hunterdon Co., N.J.* (Hackettstown, N.J.: E. Winton, Printer, 1860) 3-4.

⁴⁴ *Life* 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

what was he warning professed Christians and young people? That they, too, could be capable of committing murder? That morality is superficial or tenuous? And what about "mothers who are seeking eligible marriages for their daughters?" Is he saying that a young man who appears to be a good catch may be a potential murderer? Should mothers not be ambitious for their daughters to make a good marriage? Like the *Journal* articles, Harden leaves the conclusions up to the reader.

His formal confession, meanwhile, has no real sense of penitence. Harden almost sounds baffled by Louisa's death and by what he has done:

After she was dead, I was afraid to go in the room alone where she lay. She looked more beautiful than ever before. I did not know that poisoning was considered as murder. Did not know the penalty was death till after she was dead.... Did not know anything about analyzing the stomach and detecting poison.⁴⁶

A strange confession, indeed. Did Harden really believe that he could get out of a disagreeable marriage by poisoning his wife? Did he really believe that he would be punished only by imprisonment?

The courtship letters follow the confession, and are without commentary. As mentioned earlier, the fact that they do not conform to general love-letter standards may tell the reader that the courtship (and marriage) was difficult, but the reader obviously is invited to draw his or her own conclusions.

The last section of the book details Harden's execution and appears to be based upon the *Journal* article. In fact, the book follows the article word for word in some sections. Harden is portrayed as collected and dignified, even up to the moment of death. Unlike the *Journal* article, however, the piece contrasts Harden's calm conduct with that of the loud, disrespectful crowd.

During all this time the noises outside the jail continued, and the shouts and laughter of the crowd could be distinctly heard even in the condemned cell. The roof of a neighboring barn broke down under the crowd heaped upon it, and soon after the limb of a cherry-tree, in an adjoining yard, broke off, with a great crash, and brought to the earth with it some dozen persons who had swarmed, like bees, upon this frail support. Upon both of these occasions, the yelling, hooting and outcry of the people defied description; and the company inside the yard, losing all self-control, rushed upon the gallows to peer over the wall, or shouted their inquiries to the occupants of the windows above. With such excitements, and in vending and buying very poor photographs of the condemned man

⁴⁶ *Life* 21.

-- sold at the very door of his cell and at the foot of his gallows --
the time wore away...⁴⁷

Also unlike the *Journal* article, the book does not mention that Harden was refused burial on Christian ground. Instead it sentimentally chooses to note that he "was buried on his father's farm, in sight of the house..."⁴⁸ The booklet ends with the hope that Harden's angel will gaze pityingly upon his sorrowing relatives. The fact that he is pictured as an angel could indicate the sincerity of his repentance and the surety God's forgiveness and mercy. A photograph of Harden is on the last page of the booklet.

Since the piece was published mainly to secure funds for Harden's father, it is not truly gallows literature, at least as Masur defines the genre. This text probably is more along the lines of a souvenir booklet, something that local people would purchase out of curiosity or to benefit one of their own. Its merchandise-like nature may be the reason that the booklet lacks commentary and seems to have been hastily slapped together.

"A Moral Monster" -- The Easton Evening Express

The sole article from the *Easton Evening Express* makes a better fit with Halttunen's thesis regarding the "monsterhood" of murderers. Easton is in Pennsylvania, just across the Delaware River. Although it is in close proximity to Warren and Hunterdon Counties, it nevertheless is far enough away for Harden to be viewed as something other than a "local boy."

The article begins by referring to Harden as "this unfortunate young man," but immediately goes on to explain that as a boy, he "was one of the leaders in every mischief that occurred in his neighborhood, in fact he seemed so reckless that one of the old men in that neighborhood said he would never stop his mischief till he ended his life on the gallows..."⁴⁹

The *Express* piece then raises the specter of hypocrisy:

That one who bore the spotless robes of a Herald of the Gospel and administrator of the sacred emblems of a Saviour's dying love should at the same time have his hands dyed red with the blood of her whom he had sworn to cherish and protect, without ever showing any signs of his guilt is remarkable. He is truly, as Mr. Dayton said in his argument, a moral monster, and that same self-control has born him up till within a few weeks.⁵⁰

What was so monstrous about Harden was the fact that he could conceal his true intentions and character behind a false facade of piety. He is painted as cool and heartless, making jokes even on his last night and caring only about publicity: "He stepped on the drop,

⁴⁷ *Life* 45.

⁴⁸ *Life* 48.

⁴⁹ "Execution of Harden," *Easton Evening Express* 6 July 1860: 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

and looked around, remarking, 'That when he was a preacher he could ride through the town and no one would notice him, but now thousands came to see him.'"⁵¹

The *Express* reports that one of the ropes used in the Carter and Parke execution of 1845 was brought out for Harden, but broke when it was tested. Joseph Carter, Jr., Abner Parke, and Peter W. Parke were executed for murdering four people with a hatchet, a crime which was "of such an inhuman and revolting character as to send a shudder of horror through the whole county and wherever the deed was known."⁵² The equation of Harden with Carter and the Parkes was an indication of the monstrosity of his crime.

The paper reported that Harden was unafraid to die and was aware of the disgrace that he has brought upon his family. His self-control, however, was still noticeable. The *Express* notes that, after having knelt and prayed upon the gallows, "he arose and stepped on the drop, without showing any outward signs of emotion that must have filled his soul."⁵³

"A Malignant Soul" -- The New-York Times

New York City is quite a distance from the murder site and the murderer's family, and *The New-York Times* is free in its condemnation not only of Harden but also of the crowds who came to Belvidere for the execution. Because Harden's motives were unclear, and because he was not personally known to the people of New York, it was apparently easy to picture him as a monster, as something inhuman. At the same time, the huge crowds that came out to see or to be near his execution not only called up urban upper-and-middle class fears of mobs, but seemed to take on Harden's monstrosity, as well.

Harden is pictured as a hypocrite of the first degree, one who was able to pull the wool over the eyes of good Christian folk and whose repentance therefore was suspect. He was unlike normal people in that his soul was "black and malignant."

...we are not in the least surprised to read of saintly serenades being given to this monster of cruelty, -- of fair and lovely hands ministering to his physical comfort in his cell, of attentive ears listening to the gracious words that flow from his lips as fluently as when he made them the panders to his vices, and of tender hearts rejoicing in he indications which his daily walk and conversation afford of a mind at peace with Heaven.... We have nothing to say against all this, -- we hope this wretched murderer is a sincere penitent.... But we find it difficult to imagine a form of crime more utterly unredeemed, more thoroughly marked by every circumstance of aggravation and enormity -- more perfectly

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² James P. Snell, *History of Warren County* Vol, II (Washington, N.J., 1881).

⁵³ "Execution," *Easton Evening Express*: 1.

indicative of a black and malignant soul, than that for which HARDEN is about to suffer death.⁵⁴

The *Times* seems to feel that the Christian community's ministry to Harden (which had been commended by the *Journal*) was a waste of time and that, even after he had been declared guilty, Harden was still fooling people.

The article recounts Harden's success as a minister, but declares that he successfully concealed "from the public eye his true character, and so completely did he hoodwink the authorities of the church, that while a villain at heart, he was a saint in appearance."⁵⁵ Harden was a full-fledged confidence man, whose "whole life was opened up and a series of iniquities, hypocrisies, transgressions, and impieties exhibited, which would make the very Asmodeus open wide his eyes with astonishment."⁵⁶

The follow-up article, which dealt with Harden's execution, is obsessed with the crowd's size and behavior. The reporter reveals that some people wanted the execution to be public, even though public executions were illegal and carried a \$200 fine. The citizens of Belvidere, however, offered to pay the fine, reasoning that:

thousands of people from the surrounding townships and villages would come to witness the execution, and their coming would benefit Belvidere, pecuniarily speaking, very largely, and it was also thought that as HARDEN was so very well known there, that his public execution would have a grand moral effect upon the young men...⁵⁷

The writer goes to great lengths to describe the crowd, and criticizes both their curiosity and their reasons for coming to Belvidere.

Well-dressed, substantial-looking farmers; overdressed, brainless-looking fops; the adjoining county sheriff, the near-by town constable, the village pastor, the scholar, the gawk, the 'stage Yankee,' the Pennsylvania Dutchman, and troops of open-mouthed short trowsered little boys, with gingerbread cards in their hands, might be seen wending their several ways toward one general object -- the Courthouse; old ladies with antiquated bonnets; green umbrellas and satchels; young ladies with broad hats, calico dresses, black silk mits, flashing eyes and stella shawls; thin-visaged, sharp-nosed, go-ahead, hoopless females, with brown

⁵⁴ "The Execution of Harden," *The New-York Times* 4 July 1860: 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Howard, "Execution of Harden," *The New York Times* 7 July 1860: 1.

hands, compressed lips and India-rubber boots; and sweet little blue-eyed girls not more than seven or eight years old -- all, all in hot haste pushed toward the one great object as above -- the Courthouse.... They were all bent on accomplishing a feat which should serve as a feast of fat things in future gossips and a tale of horror which could hereafter be told in their fire-side corners...⁵⁸

Vendors were selling souvenirs right in the prison yard, and even that crowd was ill-behaved: "One old lame man, with green spectacles, a cancer on his lip, and an iron hook fastened to the end of his arm stump, was selling HARDEN'S photograph for fifteen cents. A disgusting, short-haired, pimply chap was exhibiting obscene pictures to his friends..."⁵⁹ To add to the carnivalesque atmosphere, people played with the gallows and cut pieces from it for souvenirs.

When Harden appeared, the *Times* writer portrays him as cool and outwardly unmoved, except during his prayer, at which time his voice trembled. After the execution, a mob scene ensued as people struggled to get to view the scaffold.

Want of space will not permit us to record the many scenes of riot, of confusion, of disorder and of indecency which presented themselves to our view. Suffice it to say that a bad man has met a deserved death in a cool, collected manner... that the men and women of that section of the country eternally disgraced themselves by their untimely, unwise, improper and inhuman behavior...⁶⁰

In the eyes of the *Times* reporter, then, Harden's monstrosity had extended to the entire population of Belvidere.

CONCLUSION

Although Karen Halttunen suggests that nineteenth-century Americans tended to look upon inexplicable murders as the work of a monstrous psyche, it may be that the closer to home and the better known the murderer was, the more difficult it was to see him (or her) in such a light. Certainly, the newspaper accounts surrounding Jacob Harden seem to support that conclusion. *The Warren Journal* kept silent regarding Harden's motives and refrained from giving a critique of his personality. He was one of their own, hence, it was easier to see him as a "poor boy." *The Life, Confession, and Letters of Courtship* booklet, apparently issued as a souvenir for the benefit of the Harden family, also offered no interpretation of Harden's confession, life story, letters and wrote sympathetically about execution and burial. Meanwhile,

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

the *Easton Evening Express*, whose constituency may not have known Harden or his family, took a harder line, viewing him as a moral monster but retaining sympathy for Harden's relatives and making little comment about the crowd's behavior. *The New-York Times*, the source furthest from the Hardens, took the harshest stand, painting the murderer as a confidence man with a "black and malignant soul" who managed to fool everyone around him until he was undone by his own evil plans. It then extended Harden's monstrosity to the execution, which was portrayed as a dark and dangerous carnival.

All this, in turn, raises some questions. Is Harden's situation an exception, or can similar patterns be found in other nineteenth-century murder cases? Were murderers defined as monsters by regional and national press, while local papers refrained from commenting on their sons and daughters? This, of course, requires much more research and many more pages, but may in the end uncover an intriguing difference between local and regional journalism.

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