

= Martha Wise =

Martha Wise (1884 ? June 28 , 1971) , born Martha Hasel , was an American poisoner . After her husband died and her family forced her to end a relationship with a new lover , Wise retaliated by poisoning seventeen family members , of whom three died , in 1924 . She was convicted of one of the murders , despite defense claims that she was mentally ill and that her lover had ordered her to poison her family . The case is considered one of the most sensational of the era in Ohio , where it occurred .

= = Early life = =

Wise was born in 1884 to Sophie Hasel and her husband , farmers in Hardscrabble , a town in Medina County , Ohio . Three brothers and a sister were also born to the family , although contemporary sources name only one , a brother named Fred . In 1906 , Martha Hasel met the substantially older Albert Wise at a box social ; the two were married , though Wise neglected to give her a wedding ring .

The marriage was not happy . Martha moved onto Albert 's 50 @-@ acre (20 ha) farm , but quickly discovered that he expected a farmhand more than a wife , and life was no less poor as a married woman than it had been when she lived with her parents . Even when pregnant , she was forced to do farm work that was generally male @-@ oriented (such as plowing fields and slopping hogs) as well as the usual household chores of baking and cleaning . The couple 's first child , Albert , did not survive infancy ; four others , Everett , Gertrude , Kenneth , and Lester , did .

Wise 's main source of diversion during this period was funerals ; she seldom missed a visit to any funeral held in or near the town , whether she had known the deceased or not . When questioned , she simply said that she liked funerals . Albert Wise died suddenly in 1923 , leaving his wife a 40 @-@ year @-@ old widow with four children . Her odd behavior and fixation on funerals became more noticeable , and she began not only attending funerals , but openly crying and lamenting at them , no matter who had died .

= = Deaths = =

Within a year of Albert Wise 's death , Martha Wise , though not considered a particularly good or attractive catch , found new male companionship in the form of Walter Johns , who worked as a farmhand on property adjacent to her farm . The relationship was frowned upon by Wise 's family , and both Wise 's mother , Sophie Hasel , and her aunt , Lily Gienke , made no secret of their desire for Wise to end the relationship . By the end of 1924 , Wise had acquiesced , and the relationship ended . Johns moved to Cleveland and the couple lost contact .

On Thanksgiving evening , 1924 , several members of the family , including Sophie Hasel , fell ill with a severe stomach ailment . The others recovered shortly , but Hasel 's illness worsened , and she died on December 13 , 1924 .

New Year 's Eve of 1925 brought more illness . Wise 's uncle Fred Gienke , his wife , Lily , and several of their children all began suffering stomach pains similar to those Hasel had experienced before her death . Several family members were hospitalized , and Lily and Fred were both dead by February 1925 . In total , seventeen relatives were taken ill with similar symptoms in the fall and winter of 1924 / 1925 . Four of the Gienke children were left partially paralyzed from the mysterious illness .

= = Investigation = =

After the deaths of the Gienkes , authorities began to investigate the cluster of deaths . The county sheriff , Fred Roshon , soon discovered that Martha Wise had signed at a local drug store for a series of purchases of large quantities of arsenic . An autopsy on Lily Gienke confirmed the presence of arsenic in her digestive tract . Brought in for questioning by the sheriff , Wise at first

claimed she had obtained the arsenic to kill rats , but eventually confessed that she had used it to poison family members by putting it in water buckets and coffee pots the family drank out of .

= = Trial = =

Despite her confession , Wise pleaded not guilty to the charge of murdering Lily Gienke in front of a grand jury on March 23 , 1925 . She told the grand jury that she was irresistibly attracted to attending funerals , and that when there were not enough funerals in the community , she was driven to create them by killing . Wise was indicted on a charge of first @-@ degree murder on April 7 , 1925 .

Wise 's trial for murder began on May 4 , 1925 . She was represented by Joseph Pritchard and prosecuted by Joseph Seymour . Defense claims included that Wise was criminally insane and that she was ordered to commit the murders by her former lover , Walter Johns . A number of setbacks plagued the defense , including the May 6 suicide of Wise 's sister @-@ in @-@ law , Edith Hasel , and the subsequent collapse of her husband Fred Hasel , both of whom had been prepared to testify for the defense ; the recantation of testimony by a man named Frank Metzger , who told the prosecution on cross @-@ examination that the defense had asked him to perjure himself to support claims that Wise was insane ; and Wise 's choice to take the stand on her own behalf . Family members including Wise 's son , Lester , and three of the Gienkes ' children testified against her .

After one hour of jury deliberation , Wise was found guilty of first @-@ degree murder . The jury urged mercy in sentencing , and the judge sentenced Wise to a life sentence in prison , under the terms of which she could only be freed by executive clemency .

= = Later life = =

In 1962 , as a result of Wise 's good behavior in prison , Ohio governor Michael DiSalle commuted Wise 's sentence to second @-@ degree murder and she was paroled at age 79 . Wise 's remaining family refused to take her in , and a number of rest homes for the elderly similarly declined her residency ; within three days Wise returned to prison , lacking anywhere else to go . Her parole and the commutation of her sentence were revoked . Wise died in prison on June 28 , 1971 .

= = In media = =

Wise was featured in a 1930 Toledo News @-@ Bee article series profiling " [w] omen who are paying the price for folly , women who gambled against society and lost " . A 1962 issue of the St. Joseph Gazette called the Wise case " one of Ohio 's most publicized crimes of the era " , and she has been labeled the " poison widow of Hardscrabble " and a " poison fiend " .

Wise 's case was covered in a 2008 episode of the Investigation Discovery network series Deadly Women .