

Title:

The First Serial Killer - Ed Gein

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A serial killer who served as the inspiration to numerous films, among them Psycho, The Silence of the Lambs, Maniac, Three on a Meathook, Deranged, Ed Gein, The Movie, and the Texas Chainsaw Massacre.

He was born on August 27, 1906 in La Crosse, Wisconsin and lived with his domineering and fanatically religious mother, Augusta, and his older brother, Henry, on a 195-acres family homestead outside Plainfield, Wisconsin. His father, George, a no-good alcoholic, and much despised by Augusta, died in 1940, aged 67. His brother abruptly followed suit in 1944, aged 43 (he died in a mysterious and suspicious brush fire). Ed's mother passed away a year later, on December 29, 1945, aged 67. Ed remained all alone and subsisted on Federal farm subsidies and his occasional bouts as the community's itinerant handyman and babysitter.

After his mother died, Ed sealed the upper floor as a shrine, and lived in a single room by the kitchen. He accumulated a library of anatomy books, porn magazines, horror and adventure novels, historical accounts of the Nazi medical experiments in Auschwitz and elsewhere, and medical encyclopedias. At night, he performed rudimentary surgeries on exhumed and decomposing female bodies about whose death he learned from the obituaries in the local paper. His semi-retarded friend Gus helped him dig up the graves, including, reportedly, the body of Ed's own mother.

Even at this early necrophiliac phase, Gein kept the victims' internal organs

and draped himself with the flayed skins or fitted them onto a tailor's mummy. Around the house, he wore women's panties stuffed with excised vaginas. Contrary to rumor, he did not have sex with the bodies. They smelled too bad, he explained.

Gein wondered what it feels like being a woman and fantasized about gender reassignment. He was not shy about his collections and even showed them to visitors. For many years, Ed and his shrunken heads have been the butt of morbid local jokes. Once he told a sawmill owner named Elmo Ueek that Mary Hogan, one of his victims, is not missing. "She is at my farm right now" - confessed Ed sheepishly. No one paid any attention to the shy recluse.

When Gus was committed to an old people's home, Ed's supply of corpses dried up. To replenish it, he proceeded to murder a string of women who were in their mid to late fifties (he denied having killed young girls who vanished without a trace throughout the area starting in 1947). Bernice Worden was dragged from her hardware store on November 16, 1957 together with her cash register and \$41 in cash (Ed said he was planning to return the money, he just wanted to learn how cash registers work).

Her son, Frank, the deputy-sheriff, suspected Gein. A day later, captain Lloyd Schoephoester and the sheriff, Art Schley, found her at Gein's house, hanging upside down from a meat hook, beheaded, and gutted. Her intestines and head were discovered in a box, nails driven through her ears. Her heart rested on a plate in the living room.

A search throughout the grisly, trash and junk ridden house yielded ten preserved skins from human heads, a rug consisting of the skin from a woman's upper torso, a belt with embedded female nipples, a chair, a drum, and a wastebasket upholstered in human skin, a soup bowl made from the crown of a skull, lampshades fashioned from human flesh, a table resting on human shinbones for its legs, and a refrigerator stocked with bits of female anatomy (Ed denied the cannibalism charges levied against him). Other artifacts made of human skins (and the occasional sown-off nose) included a purse, bracelet, a sheath for a knife, and leggings. A pair of human lips were sewed onto a string (a curtain pull).

Skulls crowned the four bedposts in Gein's room. Trophies - human heads stuffed with newspapers - were pinned to the walls, flanked by nine death masks made of the original faces of dead women. A shoebox contained nine female genitalia including one painted silver (presumably his mother's). Finally, Gein peeled the breasts off one of his victims to make himself a "mammary vest". He wore it - and other garments made from human female skin - when he pretended to be his own

mother.

All in all, the house and the surrounding land contained the remains of 15 bodies but Gein himself admitted that he had murdered only two - Worden and Mary Hogan, a tavern keeper on December 8, 1954. They were both shot in the head. The police found eight bodies in the local graveyard that were exhumed and mutilated by Gein. All body parts found belonged to female adults.

Gein quickly became a cult figure and the butt of moralizing folk tales and "Geiners", macabre jokes. His farm and belongings were put on the block in a much-publicized and controversial auction. On March 20, 1958, the house burned to the ground as a result of probable arson. "Just as well" - muttered Gein when he learned of the conflagration. His Ford Sedan 1949 was displayed in carnivals and fairs by an entrepreneurial businessman for many years.

Gein spent a decade in an insane asylum but finally was judged competent to stand trial. The trial started on November 7, 1968 and the jury found him guilty but criminally insane. He was committed to Central State Hospital (for the Criminally Insane) at Waupun, Wisconsin and moved in 1978 to the Mendota Mental Health Institute. He was a model patient. There he died on July 26, 1984 of cancer and respiratory and heart ailments and was buried next to his mother in the Plainfield cemetery. His grave was desecrated by vandals.