

## THE SPIDER MAN OF MONCRIEFF PLACE

*By Fred Hobbs*

On October 17, 1941, 73-year old Philip Peters was found bludgeoned to death in the kitchen of his home at 3335 West Moncrieff Place in northwest Denver.

His body was discovered that same day after a neighbor, concerned that Peters had failed to show up for dinner to which he had been invited, called the police.

Denver homicide detectives who investigated the slaying found it a genuine mystery. They were unable initially to find any definitive clues or likely suspects in the case. Peters' wife was in the hospital recuperating from a broken hip at the time. The police found all of the home's doors and windows locked and there was no sign of forced entry.

After her hospital stay, Mrs. Peters returned to live in the house with a housekeeper. Both women reported hearing strange sounds. At first, they passed them off perhaps as natural creaking sounds that often occur, especially in older houses. Maybe they came from an elusive mouse. As the sounds persisted, though, the housekeeper, the more superstitious of the two ladies, became convinced the house was haunted. She quit her job. Not content with living alone, Mrs. Peters moved to western Colorado to live with her son.

Meanwhile, still unable to solve the murder, Denver police continued to make routine checks in hopes of finding a clue. On one of those visits, July 30, 1942, ten months after the incident occurred, one of the investigators heard a lock click on the second floor. Running upstairs, the police caught sight of a pair of legs emerging from a trap door leading to the attic. The legs turned out to belong to Theodore Edward Coneys, a down-on-his luck drifter. He was taken into police custody and confessed to the crime.

Coneys told police that a month before the murder, he decided to ask Peters, a former acquaintance, for a handout. When Coneys went to the house on Moncrieff Place, no one was present. Coneys broke into the dwelling in Peters' absence to steal food and money.

Casing the house, Coneys discovered that small trapdoor that led to a narrow attic cubbyhole. Coneys was fairly small and thin enough to squeeze through the door (which police had failed to examine further thinking that a normal-sized person could not fit through it.) Coneys lived in that small space for about five weeks without being discovered, sneaking down to the kitchen and raiding the refrigerator when he thought no one was at home.

Back to that fateful day in October, 1941: Peters *was* home. He discovered Coneys at the open refrigerator door. Peters struck at Coneys with a cane he carried, but Coneys clubbed him with an old pistol he had found in the house. After the gun broke apart, he continued his attack with a heavy old-fashioned iron stove shaker, and bludgeoned Peters to death. Then Coneys returned to the attic and resumed his purloining visits to the fridge and cupboard until the day he was caught. Coneys was tried and convicted, and spent the rest of his life at the Colorado State Penitentiary in Canon City.

Denver's daily newspapers, especially *The Rocky Mountain News* gave wide, sensationalized

publicity to the event. Headline writers and reporters picked up on a remark by one of the investigating police detectives who observed: "A man would have to be a spider to stand it long up there." Coneys became forever known as "The Spider Man of Moncrieff Place."