



Lust, Seduction & Murder  
in Massachusetts

# Beyond the Hand of God

Pamela Blevins

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Death, swift and unexpected, was common in the mid-19th century. Few people looked beyond the hand of God for the cause. But in 1860, when Frances Tirrell died in a violent fit just four months after her younger sister Mary died from a mysterious illness, the family doctor grew suspicious and suggested a post-mortem.

The results shocked the Tirrell family and the community. Frances was three months pregnant. She was not married. Her pregnancy would have brought shame upon herself and her family. Only one man could be responsible, George C. Hersey.

Hersey was well-liked, thoughtful, kind, and an industrious worker in the flourishing shoe industry in Weymouth, Massachusetts. He was a voracious reader who was rarely seen without a book. Those who knew him thought he had the makings of a fine teacher. But Hersey seemed destined to suffer tragedy. His first wife died shortly before their first anniversary. Mary Tirrell, to whom he later became engaged, died after a brief illness. Hersey appeared so devastated by Mary's death that the Tirrells invited him to live in their home. Soon, Hersey and Frances Tirrell developed a friendship described as one between "brother and sister." Then she died. But how?

Initially, doctors could find no obvious cause, but one doctor at the post-mortem suspected poison. Did Frances poison herself in an act of despair? How did she obtain a lethal poison? Or did someone she trusted poison her?

Suspicion naturally fell upon George Hersey. A seasoned Boston detective hit the streets of Weymouth and Boston to trace the supplier and purchaser of the poison. Using the most advanced technology of their day, doctors and chemists went to work to identify the poison — strychnine.

A year after Frances Tirrell's death, George Hersey went on trial for her murder. The case made news across America, from Boston to Sacramento, California, and spread across the globe, creating speculation from as far away as Australia. Was Hersey wrongly accused or was he a cold-hearted killer? Only the jury could decide.

Using the trial transcript, newspaper accounts, historical records and other sources, author Pamela Blevins writes a compelling tale of lust, seduction and murder in a small Massachusetts town.

Beyond the Hand of God, 26 chapters, a Postscript  
and Afterword. Approximately 52,000 words.  
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