

# A True Detective Mystery

(*True Detective Magazine* – early 1950s)

They started out one summer night on a casual errand.

What happened to them?

## The Incredible Disappearance

By Pat Clausen



Mysteriously missing members of the Bryan family, Mary Rachel, 4, and her mother, Lelia, 36, still being sought by SBI Director James Powell (right).



GARLAND DAVIS

*"The hand that follows intellect  
can achieve."*

In Garland we find a practical, intellectual, not easily convinced boy. He is the possessor of good judgment and foresight. Garland has a natural gift for remembering History dates and facts—for if you are in doubt about a fact in History whether Ancient, Medieval or Modern, just ask Garland. We are all interested in Garland and wish for him a successful career in whatever he undertakes.

Class Testator; Editor-in-Chief of Annual; Member of John Charles McNeil Society; Member of Baseball Team; Member of Football Club; Member of Basketball Club; Librarian.

LELIA LEWIS

*"A smile for all, a greeting glad  
A lovable, jolly way she had."*

Lelia—the kind of friend who sympathizes, loves, forgives, forgets and understands. If it is fun you are up to Lelia is with you. If you are down and out go to Lelia. She will make you laugh whether you feel like it or not. Lelia is as true a friend as one could wish. If you don't think so just ask Thelma Powell. Lelia has taken the domestic science course—you wonder what that means? Well it's a secret, so don't tell—Lelia wrote on the card which we all filled out regarding our future plans, "A preacher's wife" as the profession she wished to pursue.

Poetess of Senior Class; Member of O'Henry Literary Society; Manager of Basketball Club; Member of D. Y. C. Club, 1921-'22.

RUBY FIELDS

*"Hang sorrow—care will kill a cat  
Therefore, let's be merry."*

Every one knows that rubies are very precious gems and just so is this Ruby to the class of '23. Ruby's happy smile and her pleasant "good-morning" have won for her a place in our hearts that will remain. She is fond of music and occasionally we see her playing; then again we find her visiting business houses downtown, as well as in Lumberton—and what is she doing? Why, collecting "ads" for the *Adventurer*. She is an all-round girl—full of life and pep—that's Ruby.

Marshal O'Henry Society, 1922-'23; Manager *Adventurer*, 1922-'23; O'Henry Program Committee, 1921-'22; Class Song Writer.



## THE CLASS OF 1923

*We the Class of '23  
Are here with sadness today;  
We've fought and won the victory,  
Along life's dreary way.  
Tho' days have past and nights we've spent,  
On lessons long and dreary;  
Alas! Graduation day is here  
And we are no longer weary.  
'Tis sad to part from High School days,  
The days of joy and fun;  
'Tis time to leave the little things,  
And seek for great unknowns.  
Some of us to college, will go,  
While others stay at home;  
But we hope that each will make success  
Where ever he may roam.  
But before we part, we wish to say,  
Were it not for the teachers true;  
We the pupils, would have limped along  
And never been able to pull through.  
Ah! they were so kind to us,  
Each one doing her part;  
Teaching to us something new,  
With a glad and willing heart.  
Now may each be blessed with a home above,  
When their teachings are all to an end;  
And we the pupils who once they loved,  
On their works must depend.  
'Tis sad to think of leaving thee,  
Never to meet here anymore,  
But some great day we hope to meet  
On God's great golden shore.  
Oh! blissful moments how they fly,  
And the time, it draws so near;  
When we must part from B. H. S.,  
A school to us, so dear.  
Are we not thankful to thee, Oh God,  
Who has preserved our life;  
And brought us safely through the storms,  
With neither death nor strife?  
Now the precious moment has come,  
And our hearts bid us tell  
To friends and lovers both far and near,  
Farewell, farewell, farewell.*

—Class Poet, LELIA LEWIS, '23.



MARY RACHEL BRYAN  
4 YEARS OLD

## State Agents Probe Bryan Disappearance

### WILL SEARCH SWAMPS

SBI Director Handy Asks  
War Department For  
Troops to Aid Hunt

### MISSING SIX WEEKS.

Plan to Search Wilmington,  
Beach, Camp Davis  
Swamp Lands Told

The six-week-old disappearance of Mrs. E. C. Bryan of Carolina Beach, who, with her four-year-old daughter, Mary Rachel, dropped mysteriously from sight on the night of May 10, held the attention last night of local and state authorities as Frederick C. Handy, director of the State Bureau of Investigation, announced from Raleigh that he had "reason to fear" that the woman and child had been victims of foul play.

Simultaneously, Mr. Handy revealed that yesterday afternoon he had telegraphed the War Department in Washington, D. C., requesting the aid of at least 200 Camp Davis soldiers to comb swamp lands in the vicinity of Wilmington Beach, Wilmington and Camp Davis.

Interviewed by telephone from Wilmington last night by The Star, the SBI director said that two SBI agents had been working in New Hanover county for the past ten days in an effort to "break" the Bryan disappearance. He refused to divulge what information or leads the agents had uncovered, which, presumably, led to the request for army assistance in scouring the swamp lands of this district.

#### Going to Store

Mrs. Bryan, a comely 36-year-old woman, wife of an Atlantic Coast freight office employe, left her beach home about 9 o'clock on the night of May 10, saying she was going to a nearby grocery store to make some purchases. At the last minute before the woman left the house the couple's little daughter joined her mother. Mrs. Bryan and Mary Rachel drove off in the family's Ford coupe. They have not been seen nor heard from since.

Mr. Bryan first reported the disappearance to Carolina Beach authorities about three hours after

## SBI PROBES DISAPPEARANCE



The State Bureau of Investigation has entered the investigation seeking some solution to the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. E. C. Bryant of Carolina Beach, and her four-year-old daughter, Mary Rachel, it was announced last night from Raleigh by Frederick C. Handy, SBI director. The state director said there was reason to fear foul play had visited upon the mother and daughter, and disclosed that he had asked for permission to use 200 or more Camp Davis soldiers to search certain swamp lands in this vicinity. Mrs. Bryan and her daughter dropped from sight May 10.

## Air Raids Continued By British

RAF Blasts Channel Coast  
For The Thirteenth  
Successive Night

LONDON, June 23.—(AP)—Britain's airforce darkened the channel twilight sky with planes and blasted the invasion coast anew tonight in acceleration of the violent aerial offensive which indirectly supports the Russians on the distant Eastern front.

Mr. Bryan first reported the disappearance to Carolina Beach authorities about three hours after his wife and daughter had failed to return home. A check of the grocery store developed the fact that Mrs. Bryan had not reached there.

On May 11, at the request of Carolina Beach police, sheriff's deputies joined the hunt for the missing pair. A systematic search was conducted of the forests between the beach and Wilmington, and for two days a private airplane was used to scout from the air little-traveled country roads.

For the first week after the disappearance, Wilmington city police, deputy sheriffs and Carolina Beach authorities dragged the Cape Fear river and numerous small inlets and the inland waterway on the possibility that the woman, child and car had plunged into deep water.

#### F.B.I. Investigates

Seven days after the disappearance the Federal Bureau of Investigation through its Wilmington

(Continued on Page Two; Col. 2)

# SBI STILL HOPES TO FIND COUPLE

## New Hanover Disappearance Most Baffling Case in SBI Experience

After more than a year of intensive investigation, the disappearance of Mrs. Lelia Lewis Bryan and her four-year-old daughter of Carolina Beach continues to be the most baffling mystery ever tackled by the State Bureau of Investigation.

SBI Director Frederick C. Handy, despairing of ever finding the couple alive, said yesterday his bureau would take a new tack in the search and comb the Inland Waterway for traces of the automobile in which the couple disappeared.

Agent James F. Bradshaw, who has conducted exhaustive searches, will use an electrical submersible detector in the Inland Waterway where it intersects US 421 on the theory that perhaps Mrs. Bryan's automobile plunged into the channel on the night of May 10, 1941, when she and her daughter disappeared.

The Bryans lived at Carolina Beach. On the night of May 10, 1941, Mrs. Bryan and her daughter drove away from the home about 9 o'clock to go to a store about two blocks away. They never appeared at the store, and no trace has been found of them since that night.

Commencing their search June 25, 1941, SBI agents have tracked down reports of the couple far and wide, as far away as New York State. Agent Bradshaw, also a flyer, covered the New Hanover County territory around Carolina Beach in an airplane in the hope of sighting some sign of the missing car, a 1935 black Ford coupe, engine number 18-1833996 and 1941 N. C. license No. 219-056.

The Automobile Underwriters Association was notified to watch for the automobile in every state in the union. Since Mrs. Bryan was a registered nurse, her picture and description were published in the American Journal of Nursing. Pictures of her and the infant daughter, along with full descriptions were published in the bulletin of the FBI.

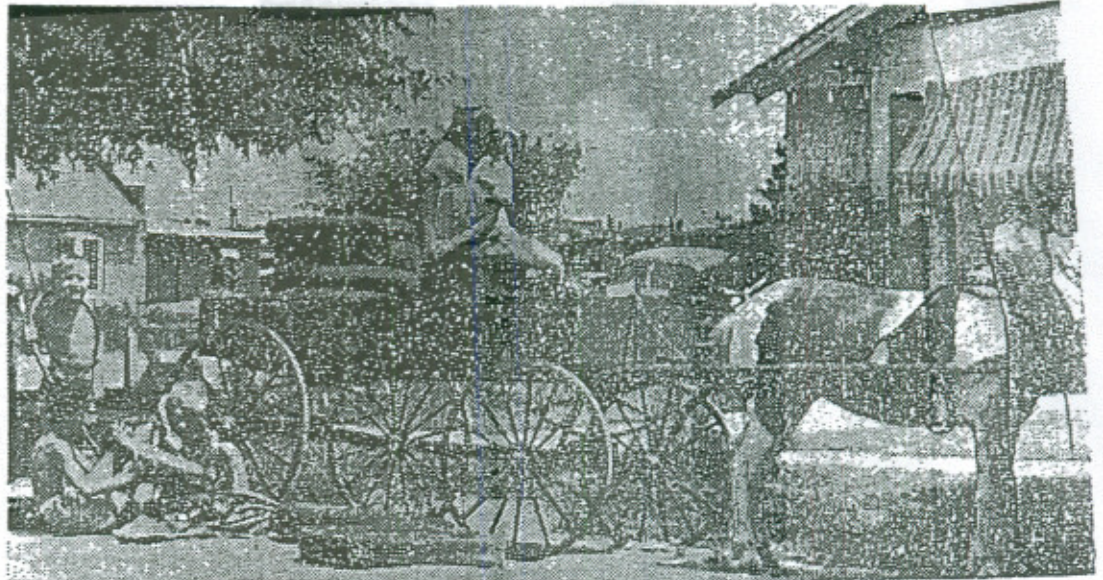
If the search of the Inland Waterway fails to produce any clue, the SBI will face another dead end, but the case will not be closed.

## PEOPLE URGED TO AVOID HEAVY HOLIDAY TRAFFIC

Tar Heels planning Fourth of July week-end holidays were urged by the ODT office here yesterday to take their pleasure close to home to avoid congestion of the state's overburdened transportation stem.

L. R. Stallings, N. C. manager of the Office of Defense Transportation, said the presence of thousands of service men in this section made necessary for civilians to fore-

## Saving Rubber in Collection Drive



Four Stantonburg youths decided to save rubber while collecting scrap rubber during the current campaign, and so they hitched a pony to a wagon and made a house-to-house canvass. The four youngsters pictured above with their pony and wagon are Anne Stanton, Eddie Vick, Tommy Stanton and Ted Best. Rex Best, oil distributor at Stantonburg, sent out postcards announcing the scrap rubber campaign. His cards said: "Get every ounce of rubber scrap. Help wipe the Axis off the map. Each scrap of rubber on the pile will help you drive an extra mile." Stantonburg with a population of 595 collected 18,157 pounds of rubber the first ten days of the drive.

## VESSEL LAUNCHED AT WILMINGTON

### William Hawkins, 18th Liberty Ship, Christened by Miss Jean Vendig

Wilmington, July 3.—Named for a colonial North Carolina governor, the William Hawkins, 18th Liberty freighter built by the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, slid down the ways this afternoon at 3:30 o'clock after being christened by Miss Jean E. Vendig of Wilmington.

Miss Vendig, a rising senior at New Hanover High School, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Morales C. Vendig, of Philadelphia and Wilmington. Her father is resident plant engineer here for the United States Maritime Commission. Her maids of honor were Misses Ruth Hunsberger of Philadelphia and Dorothy Southerland of Wilmington.

The ship is the second one launched here to be named for a North Carolina governor. The first was the Zebulon B. Vance, which slid down the ways on December 6, 1941.

William Hawkins was the son of Philemon Hawkins, who was a brother of Col. Benjamin Hawkins. He was elected to the Assembly in 1805 and elected speaker of the House of Commons. In 1811 he was elected governor and took an active and prominent part in the war. He died in 1812.

## Gets Wings



### Hunt Mother And Child In Eastern N. C.

WHITEVILLE, May 28.—The frantic search for Mrs. E. C. Bryan and her four-year-old daughter, Mary Rachel, of Wilmington, who have been missing for more than two weeks, led into Columbus county last night when New Hanover officers were in this vicinity running down a tip that a woman and little girl answering a description of the long-sought pair had been seen in Columbus county.

Constable Ezzell of Wilmington, told Chief of Police Coleman, after his investigation here, that he thought the officers had found some tangible clue to the mystery which has baffled the entire State for nearly three weeks.

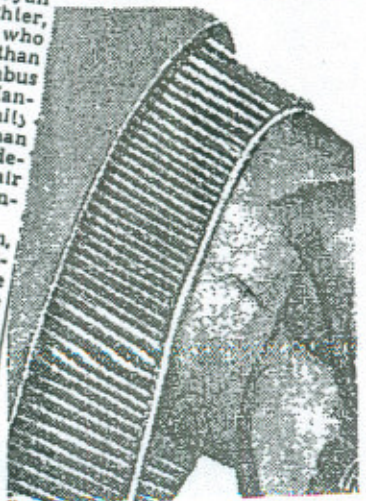
The nature of the information found in this county was not disclosed.

Chief Coleman said that Ezzell did say, however, that the investigation led the officers to believe that Mrs. Bryan and her daughter may have been in this area some time since...

## SOLDIER IS INJURED IN FALL FROM TRAIN

Wilson, July 3.—Charles Mole, of Centerville, Mass., private in the army, was in a Fort Bragg hospital tonight with a fractured right leg as a result of a fall he had from a moving freight train near Contenton here early this morning.

While walking the length of the train, his foot tripped over one of the cars and he fell from the moving train. His yell attracted no attention on the train and he fell without him. He lay on the track with his leg for some time before he was picked up by a nearby farmer who took him to the secret service hospital with a shotgun.



# Wilmington Morning

WILMINGTON, N. C., TUESDAY, MAY 13, 1941

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## Missing Mother And Child



Admittedly baffled by the strange disappearance of Mrs. E. C. Bryan, attractive wife of an Atlantic Coast Line employe, and her four-year-old daughter, Mary Rachel Bryan (shown above), county and state police authorities expressed grave fears that the mother and her child had met foul play since they mysteriously dropped from sight Saturday night after leaving their Carolina Beach home to shop at a grocery store. A two-day search has produced no tangible clues, Sheriff C. David Jones said last night. Authorities over a wide Atlantic states area have been asked to aid in the hunt for them.

## Foul Play Feared In Case Of Missing Woman, Child

### WIDE SEARCH IS MADE

**Mrs. E. C. Bryan, Daughter Missing From Home Since Early Saturday Night**

Frankly apprehensive of foul play, city, county and state police authorities last night were about prepared to give up, locally at least, their intensive two-day search for Mrs. E. C. Bryan, attractive Carolina Beach resident, and her four-year-old daughter, wife and child of an Atlantic Coast Line employe, missing from their home since Saturday night.

**No Funds**  
Without clothes other than those she was wearing and with no known funds, Mrs. Bryan—the former Bellia Lewis—left her home Saturday night, accompanied by Mary Rachel Bryan, her daughter, presumably to make some purchases at a Carolina Beach grocery store.

She has not been seen or heard of since.

Sunday and yesterday, by air, by foot and by automobile, police authorities have combed the wooded areas between Carolina Beach and Wilmington in search for the missing mother and child, or for some

## Camp Davis Officially Welcomes Men Today

With Brig.-Gen. James B. Crawford, Governor J. Melville Broughton and others on the speakers' stand, some 4,000 soldiers, including about 1,500 selectees, will be officially welcomed to Camp Davis this afternoon.

The welcoming ceremony, to be broadcast over radio WPTF, Raleigh, will start at 4:30 o'clock, following the governor's inspection tour of the anti-aircraft firing center. It will be the chief executive's first trip to the reservation. Army officials at the camp have been advised that a party of state officials will accompany the governor.

Officers and men of the camp will assemble on the temporary parade grounds, directly in front of the constructing quartermaster's building to hear the welcoming addresses.

## CHIANG PREDICTS CHINESE CAN WIN

# Rudolf Hess, Nazi Hitler's No. 2 Man Under Conditions Important Deal

## NAZIS REPORT PARTY CHIEF MISSING

Say He Is Presumably Lost on an Airplane Flight While Victim of 'Hallucinations'; Was Forbidden to Use Plane

## GERMANY'S NO. 2 POLITICAL HEIR

Berlin Says He Left Behind Letter Showing Traces of Mental Disorder; Arrest All Adjutants Who Knew of Flight

BERLIN, Tuesday, May 13.—(AP)—Rudolf Hess, one of Germany's "big three", was reported missing today, presumably lost on an airplane flight while the victim of "hallucinations."

The fuehrer had ordered his deputy in party affairs not to make airplane flights for some time past, and Hess' adjutants—whose number was not specified—have been that he appeared to have been suffering "hallucinations" ment said.

(As heard in London, a Berlin radio broadcast said Hess was believed either to have crashed or fallen from the machine.)

### Left Saturday

The 47-year-old Hess, who was designated by Hitler at the outbreak of the war as his political heir after Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering, left Augsburg in Bavaria about 6 p. m. Saturday, piloting his own machine, and has not been heard from since, it was said. No plane wreckage has been reported found.

Hess left behind a letter showing "in its confusion traces of mental disorder which led to fears that party fellow member Hess was a victim of hallucinations," the party statement added.

### Complete Announcement

The complete announcement said: "Party fellow member Hess, who, because of his failing health, for years has been strictly forbidden by the fuehrer to be active in aviation, was able, contrary to these instructions, to acquire an airplane again recently.

"On Saturday, May 10, about 6 p. m., party fellow member Hess started on a flight at Augsburg from which he has not returned to this day.

"A letter left behind unfortunately shows in its confusion the traces of mental disorder which led to fears that party fellow member Hess was a victim of hallucinations.

### Arrests Ordered

"The fuehrer immediately ordered the arrest of the adjutants of party fellow member Hess who alone knew about those flights, and did not hinder them and did not report them in spite of the in-

## HESS CHALLENGED BY SCOT FARMER

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Fernstrom, the M. I. T. leave from his school to Wilmington yards, paid iment to the yard con- the shipbuilding men as- h him in the project yes-

pany is exceptionally for- securing adequate and labor, both skilled and un- I am sure the construc- 37 ships will proceed in a actory manner," Fern- at the keel-laying.

### Public Barred

was barred from view- t keel-laying, and news- rs anxious to record the cture-form were barredd rd, on orders, it was said, ime commission.

on Page Three; Col. 2)

## ARE JAILED ASSAULT CASE

### mb, Sub-Foreman pyards Here, Is ired in Fight

o laborers were held in ght in \$1,000 bond each were searching for a l man following an at- lay morning on a sub- the Sunset Park yards h Carolina Shipbuilding

# First Bryan Case Clue Investigated By Police

## NATURE NOT REVEALED

### Operator of Filling Station Says Woman Purchased Gas on Night of May 10

The first substantial clue which may lead to early solution of the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. E. C. Bryan and her four-year-old daughter from their Carolina beach home May 10 was being investigated by city police and F. B. I. agents last night, Police Chief Joseph C. Ruark announced.

The chief said he could not divulge the nature of the clue, nor would he disclose its source.

It was believed, however, that the latest turn in the puzzling disappearance case came from the tentative identification of Mrs. Bryan's picture by a Third street service station attendant who informed Chief Rourk yesterday that he was "pretty sure" that Mrs. Bryan was the woman who had purchased 13 gallons of gasoline from his station about 10 o'clock on the night of May 10.

The attractive Mrs. Bryan — the former Lelia Lewis of Elizabethtown — and Mary Rachel Bryan, 4, dropped from sight about 9 p. m. May 10 after driving away from their beach home, presumably to purchase groceries at a nearby beach store.

Certain phases of the mystery, including "dead end" clues, were reviewed yesterday by local F. B. I. representatives, leading to some speculation that further inquiry into the case will be made by the federal officers. Contacted, the F. B. I. agents were uncommunicative, claiming their entry into the disappearance was "routine."

## UAW WINS VOTE AT FORD PLANTS

### Derelict Is Found In Atlantic Ship Lanes

NEW YORK, May 22.—(AP)—For three months a derelict barge has been drifting in the southern steamship lanes of the Atlantic, a menace to shipping, it was revealed today with arrival of the Portuguese liner Guine.

Chief Officer Raoul Savage Barbosa said that the hulk, fitted with a 45-foot steel crane, was spotted by his ship last Saturday about 1,600 miles from New York. He and 11 men boarded it to investigate.

The Guine sent out a message warning shipping of the barge's location.

## FUNDS CAMPAIGN PLANNED BY USO

### Representatives of Eastern N. C. Counties Hold Meeting in Raleigh

RALEIGH, May 22.—(AP)—One hundred and twenty-five representatives of 41 eastern North Carolina counties met here today to plan a drive for funds for the United Service Organizations, an organization to operate recreation centers in the vicinity of military posts and camps.

North Carolina's quota in the national drive for \$10,765,000 has been set at \$124,500.

E. J. Fuller of the U.S.O. national office told the county representatives that the federal government plans to build immediately 339 recreation centers in 125 defense areas. The task of S. O., he said, is to centers with person/ ate them.

Governor Broug'



IT WAS SATURDAY, May 10th, 1941, Edis C. Bryan, 40-year-old freight manager for a railroad company, had spent the afternoon loafing around his cottage in Carolina Beach, North Carolina. It was a neat, white frame cottage, a five-room, one-story structure, with a basement and a separate garage in the back, like so many others in the neighborhood. Edis and his wife, Lelia, and their 4-year-old daughter, Mary Rachel, were very happy there.

That afternoon, Leila, who was a trained nurse, had busied herself dusting the furniture and paring vegetables for the evening meal. Mary Rachel, played with her dolls in the corner of the living room. Edis' sister, Myrtle, who was visiting the couple, remained in her room, writing letters.

Around five o'clock Lelia slipped out of the house, got into the family car and drove away. Edis and his sister didn't even notice that she had left until they heard the Ford coupe back out of the garage. "And then," Edis Bryan later stated, "I just thought she'd gone to buy some groceries." Lelia returned home around 6:30. She didn't say where she had been and it didn't occur to Edis to question his wife. Around seven o'clock a neighbor dropped in, chatted a few minutes and departed. Lelia went into the kitchen, Mary Rachel tagging along.

"What would you like for supper, honey?" Lelia asked her small daughter. "Bacon and eggs," the child answered quickly. While Mrs. Bryan was preparing Mary Rachel's meal, she called out to her husband in the living room: "Edis, I've got something real special for you tonight." Edis pricked up his ears. He was getting hungry. "What you got, honey?" "Roast beef!" Edis Bryan smiled. Roast beef was his favorite dish and Lelia frequently cooked it for him.

Shortly after 7:30, Edis, Myrtle, and Lelia sat down to a tempting dinner of roast beef, potatoes, greens, coffee and pie. At 8:30, the doorbell rang. It was Myrtle's date, calling for her. Myrtle said goodbye to her brother and sister-in-law and left the house. Lelia picked up the dishes, washed and dried them and put them away. Around nine o'clock, she came into the living room, still bare-legged and in her house-dress. "You

look sleepy, honey," she told her husband. Edis looked up from his paper, stretched and yawned. "Gee, I'm going to hit the hay early tonight." "Well, I thought I'd run down to the dime store first," Lelia said. "If I go to Bladenboro to visit my folks tomorrow, I really need a new brassiere. They have nice ones at the dime store." Edis glanced at his watch. "Is the store open this late?" "Oh, yes," Lelia replied. "They stay open until ten Saturday nights. But I'll need some money," she added. "I spent all I had on that roast." "It was worth it." Her husband grinned. He pulled his wallet out of his hip pocket, extracted two one-dollar bills and handed them to his wife. "Will that be enough?" "Yes." Lelia nodded and tucked the bills in a pocket of her dress.

"Can I go? Can I go?" Suddenly Mary Rachel was dancing in front of her mother. "Can I go with you, Mama?" "All right," Lelia answered. Mary Rachel grabbed her mother's hand. "Mama, let's ride!" she pleaded. Lelia and Edis exchanged a parental smile.

The 'dime store was only a 15-minute walk, but Mary Rachel loved to ride in the automobile. "Okay," Lelia agreed, "we'll ride." Edis heard the car motor start outside, the gears shift and the hum of the engine fade away into the night. In a few minutes, he decided to go to bed. He had just crawled between the sheets, when the doorbell rang. He rose and opened the front door to find Lelia's brother, Tom, on the steps. "Hi, Edis!" Lelia's brother greeted him. "I didn't see any lights in the house. I was wondering if anybody was home." "Come on in, Tom," Edis invited. "Lelia and Mary Rachel went down to the dime store. They'll be back soon." *BERRY*  
*WAS ASLEEP*

"Well, supposing I come back later, too?" Tom said. "I drove into town to see about buying some lumber from a fellow here." Tom lived on a farm about thirty miles from Carolina Beach. "I was just on my way over to talk to him. I'll attend to the business and stop by to see you all a little later." *60*

When Tom drove away, Edis returned to his bed, intending to remain awake reading. However, he soon dozed off and didn't wake up until he heard the persistent ringing of the doorbell. Blinking his eyes, Edis glanced at the clock beside his bed. It was 12:30. He threw on his bathrobe and groped his way to the front door. It was Tom

again. "Sorry I woke you. But I knew Lelia wouldn't forgive me if I didn't drop by and say hello." "Oh, don't worry about waking us," Edis said. "Come on in. Lelia must be somewhere in the house." He began turning on lights as he went. Tom followed. They looked in the master bedroom. Lelia was not there. She wasn't in the guest room. They inspected Mary Rachel's room. The child's bed was empty.

Edis Bryan began calling through the house. No one answered him. He ran outside to the garage. It was empty, too. He came back and faced Lelia's brother. "I can't imagine why she'd stay out so late -- particularly with the baby." Tom and Edis sat nervously smoking cigarettes, their eyes on the front door, their ears cocked for the sound of an approaching auto. Half an hour later, Tom rose. "I hate to leave you, Edis," he declared, "but if I don't get home soon myself, my wife will be worried. Tell Lelia I'm sorry I missed her."

*NOT MARRIED*

2 After Leila's brother left, Edis Bryan got dressed. It was a warm night and the beach was only five blocks away. Sometimes on warm evenings after supper, Lelia and the baby had strolled along the shore in the moonlight. Edis grew apprehensive. Maybe they had gone down there earlier that night. Maybe something had happened.

Quickening his step, Edis walked to the water's edge and began to tramp along the damp sand. There was not a soul in sight. Suddenly Bryan remembered a neighbor who was making a dress for Lelia. Yes, she might be there. When Bryan approached the neighbor's house, his heart gave a leap. The lights were still on. He pressed the bell. "Is my wife here?" he asked, as the door opened. The neighbor looked bewildered. "Why, no, I haven't seen Mrs. Bryan all week. Something wrong?" Bryan felt a cold tremor race through his body. "Well, she drove away from the house at nine. It's almost one-thirty now. She took the baby with her. I'm worried."

Edis Bryan returned to his own home to find his sister, Myrtle, just back from her date. "Maybe she has gone up to Wilmington to visit Ida," Myrtle said. Lelia's sister, Ida, didn't have a telephone so Edis borrowed an automobile from the next door neighbor and drove the 15 miles between Carolina Beach and the city of Wilmington, North Carolina. When he arrived in the city, it was 2 A.M. Lelia's sister was startled to

see her brother-in-law at the door. "No, I haven't heard a word from Lelia," Ida said. "But I thought I saw her yesterday afternoon. I was working in my garden around six o'clock. I happened to look up and I saw Lelia drive by. I waved, but she didn't seem to notice me. Maybe I was mistaken. Maybe it wasn't Lelia. Why don't you get in touch with Cora Hollis?" "She might know something." (*Cora Hollis is a fictitious name for a person who asked to remain anonymous.*)

Bryan was acquainted with Cora. She had an apartment in Wilmington and, like his wife, Cora Hollis was a trained nurse. The two women had worked at the same hospital and were close friends. "Let's get to a phone and check," Bryan said. Ida dressed hurriedly and drove with her brother-in-law to the telephone office, where Bryan made two calls. First, he tried Cora's apartment. When she didn't answer, he tried the hospital where Cora nursed. Cora was on duty where she was summoned to the phone. "I can't imagine where Lelia is," Cora said, in answer to Edis' question. "She came by my apartment this afternoon, but she left about a quarter of six." "Did she say anything?" Edis demanded anxiously. "Anything about where she might be going tonight?" "No," Cora answered. "But she did ask me to give a message to Ida. She wanted me to tell Ida; that Lelia would like to drive with her to visit their parents Sunday. That would be this morning." Beyond that, Cora didn't know anymore.

When Edis repeated her conversation to Ida, Ida asked, "Had Lelia told you she intended to visit our parents today?" Edis nodded. "Yes, she had planned to go, if the weather was nice." "Then that's where she must be," Ida decided. "I'll bet she just took a notion to go last night, instead."

Lelia's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, lived on a plantation near Bladenboro, some 60 miles east of Wilmington. One of Lelia's brothers lived in Bladenboro and could easily drive over to the Lewis home and see if Lelia and Mary Rachel were there. When Edis phoned this brother, he agreed to go at once and investigate, promising to call Edis at Carolina Beach as soon as he got back to a telephone. Edis hung up, still worried. He drove Ida home and returned to his house to await the call. At 6 A.M. Lelia's brother phoned from Bladenboro. "Mama and Daddy haven't seen anything of Lelia," he stated. "Have you heard from her yet?" "No, I haven't," Edis told him. "Not a word—not a sign."

NO

I'm afraid—something awful may have happened." "Have you told the police?" "Not yet," Edis answered. "I was waiting to hear from you. But I'll tell them now."

At 7 A.M. Edis Bryan was relating his story to the local authorities in Carolina Beach. The police decided this was a case for the sheriff's office and drove Bryan up to Wilmington to talk with Sheriff David Jones of New Hanover County. Edis described Lelia and Mary Rachel to the smallest detail, telling them that his wife was 36, a gentle, madonna-like woman, with gray eyes, and long, black hair. She was 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighed 125 pounds. Mary Rachel, he said had dark brown hair and brown eyes. She was a talkative and friendly four year old. "My wife certainly wouldn't go very far," he added. "She was only wearing a housedress and maybe a sweater, but she didn't have on any stockings. And besides, she didn't take any money with her, except the two dollars I gave her. Yes, she had some valuable jewelry." He described it to the officers. "But she wasn't wearing any."

When asked about the automobile in which Lelia drove away, Bryan explained it was a Model A, 1935 black Ford coupe. Its engine number was 18-1833996 and it bore North Carolina license plates, 291056. The sheriff alerted the state highway patrol to be on the lookout for the Ford coupe. He then continued to question Bryan. "Had there been any family quarrels, any reason for Lelia to leave home." "No," Edis replied. "We've gotten along very well. We're a happy family." "We'll do everything we can," Sheriff Jones told him. "We'll keep you informed of our progress and, in the meantime, if you hear anything, let us know at once."

Local newspapers and radio stations asked the public to watch for the missing mother and daughter. The highway patrol stopped and inspected all black Ford "T" coupes. The sheriff's office, in cooperation with local police in Carolina Beach, began a thorough investigation.

One of their first stops was the dime store where Lelia had said she was going that night of May 10th. The manager and salespeople knew Lelia Bryan well, and when they were questioned, no one could remember having seen her in the store that evening. "We would have remembered, too," the manager stated. "We don't get many

customers that late. I'm positive Mrs. Bryan never came in here Saturday night."

The sheriff and his deputies interviewed neighbors of the Bryans. Had any of them ever heard the couple squabbling? No the neighbors said, the Bryans were a quiet, devoted pair. The authorities visited Lelia's relatives. Neither her brothers, nor her sister and her parents could offer any help. They checked with gasoline stations in the area to discover if Lelia had stopped for gas on May 10th. They talked to railroad conductors in an attempt to learn if Lelia and Mary Rachel had boarded any of the trains. Nobody recalled having seen the two after 9 P.M., Saturday, May 10th.

On June 3rd, Sheriff Jones, having been unable to uncover a single lead as to the mysterious disappearance of Lelia and Mary Rachel Bryan, appealed to the North Carolina Bureau of Investigation in Raleigh for assistance. James F. Bradshaw and other special agents of the highly-trained SBI, a state law enforcement agency similar to the FBI, took over the case.

At the little white cottage in Carolina Beach SBI agents talked with Edis Bryan. The SBI men began to look around. In Mr. and Mrs. Bryan's bedroom closet they found a small suitcase, packed with a few of Leila's and Mary Rachel's belongings. "Was your wife planning a trip?" the authorities inquired. "Yes, she had intended to visit her folks on the plantation the Sunday after she disappeared," Edis Bryan explained. "She and Mary Rachel usually stayed overnight." "We understand from the sheriff that your wife was not wearing any jewelry when she left. Is that correct?" "That's correct," Bryan replied. "You had stated that she owned some valuable jewelry -- two solitaire diamond rings, a pair of diamond earrings and a high school ring. Where is this jewelry?" "Here in this box." Bryan picked up a small gift box from the top of the bureau. He lifted the lid. All the pieces were there. "Had there been any arguments between you and your wife?" the officers asked. Bryan smiled faintly. "The usual little spats. Nothing serious."

The officers went from room to room, closely examining the house, the basement, the garage, and the yard. Nothing seemed out of order. Nothing offered even a slim clue to Lelia's and Mary Rachel's whereabouts.

*NO*

After leaving the cottage in Carolina Beach, the SBI agents checked with Bryan's associates at the railroad company in Wilmington. They learned that Edis Bryan had been employed by the firm for 20 years, and that he had been diligent and conscientious. By now, the officers were convinced that Edis Bryan was above suspicion and in no way involved in the mystery, and was cooperating with the authorities to the very best of his ability.

The agents turned their attention to the plantation home of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, Leila's parents. Friends had said that Leila was a devoted daughter and that if she were in trouble of any sort, she certainly would contact her mother and father. When the SBI agents visited the Lewis plantation, Mr. Lewis stated that he had not received any word from his daughter. He couldn't understand what could have happened to her and he was terribly worried.

At the Bladenboro post office, where the Lewis family received their mail, the postmaster told the investigators, that he was familiar with Leila's handwriting. "I'd recognize her handwriting in a minute. If a letter comes from her parents, I'll phone you at once."

While in the vicinity of Bladenboro, the agents noticed a ferry crossing which Leila might have used to reach her parents' home. They studied the piers and the ferry boat and concluded that it was possible for a car to accidentally drive off of either the boat or the piers, particularly at night when the spot was not well-lighted. They questioned the ferry boat operator. Had he noticed a woman and a child in a black coupe the night of May 10th? The operator couldn't remember whether he had or not. The SBI had the river dragged. There was no automobile in the water.

NO  
FERRY

In the course of questioning Leila's neighbors and friends, SBI investigators sought out Cora Hollis. Cora, a short blonde in her thirties, was pleasant and talkative. "When did you last see Leila Bryan?" they asked her. "Saturday, May 10th, the day she disappeared," Cora answered. "Did you tell this to the sheriff?" "Of course," Cora said. "What time Saturday did Leila Bryan visit you?" the agents asked. "Oh, around five-thirty." "Did you know you were going to see Leila that day?" "Well, in an odd way, I did."

Cora went on to explain. "You see, I received a phone call about five o'clock. It was a long distance call, from Carolina Beach. I heard the operator tell whoever was calling to deposit some money in the box. But instead, the person who was phoning, hung up. When Lelia appeared, half an hour later, I decided she had made the call to see if I was home." "Did Lelia come alone, or did she bring the baby?" "She was alone." "What did Lelia come to see you about?" "She wanted me to deliver a message to Ida, her sister," Cora replied. "She said, Go by Ida's house tonight and ask her if I can drive with her to Bladenboro tomorrow." "Ida lives in Wilmington near you?" "Not far from here." "Have you any idea why Lelia didn't give this message to Ida, herself?" "Lelia told me Ida worked late Saturday afternoons and wouldn't be home." "Did you deliver Leila's message?" "No, I didn't," Cora admitted. "I had a date Saturday night and got to the hospital just in time to go on duty. However, I had planned to write Ida a note and slip it under her door when I got off at eight. Of course, after Edis phoned at the hospital that morning, I told him and he gave the message to Ida." "Did Lelia seem depressed or worried when you saw her?" an agent questioned. "No, she was in high spirits." "How long did she stay here?" "Oh, only a few minutes. Then she left, saying she had to get home." "Have you any idea what might have happened to Lelia Bryan?" they asked. Cora shook her head. "No. Only I believe that Lelia isn't living." "Why do you say that?" Cora looked directly at the men. "She wouldn't stay away from home this long -- not with the baby."

The agents' next stop was at the home of Lelia's sister, Ida. "Are you and your sister, Lelia, very close?" they asked. "No," Ida admitted. "She has visited me only twice in the past year." "When did you last see her?" "I may have seen her the day she disappeared," Ida replied. "Late that Saturday afternoon, about six o'clock, I was working in the garden. I thought I saw Lelia drive by. I waved to her but she didn't seem to see me." "But we understand you work all day Saturday," an agent interrupted. "Why, no," Ida replied. "I always get off at one o'clock." "And Lelia knows you get off at one?" "Of course." The agents looked thoughtful. "What kind of an automobile do you own?" "I don't have any automobile," the sister replied. "Why?" "Do you have a car you might borrow to drive to Bladenboro?" "No," the sister answered, looking bewildered. "And I haven't been over to Bladenboro for months." "Thank you," said the SBI men.



Back in their offices in Raleigh, the agents of the State Bureau of Investigation reviewed their case. Obviously, Mrs. Bryan had been acting in a strange manner the day she vanished. The fact that she walked out of her house at five o'clock without telling her husband or sister-in-law where she was going, her phone call to Cora, her too-brief visit with her friend, her story about wanting to drive to Bladenboro with a sister who didn't even own a car -- it didn't add up. Had Lelia, for some unknown reason, planned to leave-home? But on the other hand, what woman would leave home, wearing a housedress and carrying only two dollars in her pocketbook? And if she had intended to run away, wouldn't she take her jewelry and the suitcase she had packed?

The possibility of suicide was not overlooked. But, the agents reasoned, would a mother also take the life of her child? And if she had killed herself and Mary Rachel, where were their bodies? What had happened to the car? No, Lelia Bryan had not acted like a woman contemplating suicide. She had a suitcase for the trip. The day before the proposed trip, that Saturday, May 10th, she had been cheerful around the house, dusted the furniture, cooked her husband's favorite dish, washed up the dishes and went out to buy a new brassiere to wear the following morning. Somewhere between the Bryan cottage and the dime store, only a few blocks apart, something or someone had interfered with her plans.

Edis Bryan still seemed to be the agents' main hope. Although convinced that he had no part in his wife's disappearance, the SBI believed that somehow he might be able to shed light on the mystery. They returned to Carolina Beach and questioned Bryan once more.

Patiently Edis Bryan told the detectives all he could. He went back through the years, describing the house he had purchased in Wilmington for his wife. Lelia however, preferred the beach, and Edis said he had sublet the Wilmington home. Lelia, he stated, used to nurse regularly at a big hospital in Wilmington and had been nursing even after Mary Rachel was born. "Although not so frequently," her husband explained. "It's difficult to get baby sitters."

Bryan went on to relate that he owned a small houseboat on Northeast Cape Fear

River and that he and Lelia had spent several happy summers on the boat before the baby came. "Do you still have the boat?" the agents inquired. "Yes, but I'm renting it to a young couple," Bryan said. "Lelia wouldn't go near the place with Mary Rachel. She was afraid the baby might fall into the water. She said maybe after Mary Rachel got bigger we would go back and use the boat in the summer.

With this slim lead, the SBI immediately went out to investigate the small pier on the river where the Bryans' houseboat was tied. The young couple occupying the craft said they hadn't seen Lelia. No one else in the vicinity had seen her. "A woman and child can't just vanish," Agent Bradshaw said. "And the automobile must be somewhere. Even if it's wrecked, the engine number will still be discernible." Bradshaw petitioned his chief, James Powell, to let him send out a nationwide alarm. Powell agreed and late that summer, law enforcers across the country were alerted to look for Lelia and Mary Rachel. Photographs of the mother and child, together with a description of the missing pair and details concerning the Ford coupe, were supplied to all police departments and sheriffs' offices throughout the United States. Every second-hand automobile company, every junk yard was checked. All nurses' registries were asked to be on the look-out for Mrs. Bryan, as it was believed that if she were living, she would try to go back to her old profession, nursing.

During the first few weeks, a deluge of replies poured into the SBI. Ford coupes turned up by the scores, but their engine numbers never matched that of the Bryan vehicle. Whenever an unfamiliar woman and child appeared in town, natives hastened to report them to the police. But they were never Lelia and Mary Rachel.

One by one, all the leads checked out. Just as hope was fading, a new wrinkle suddenly showed up in the case. One afternoon in November, a young man stepped into the Wilmington police station and told the desk sergeant: "When the newspapers published a picture of Lelia Bryan a while back, I kept thinking I'd seen her some place. Just the other day, I remembered, where. It was in a drugstore. I was sitting at the counter when she came in. She talked to the proprietor and bought something from him." Wilmington police notified the SBI and agents hastened to Wilmington to interview the drugstore owner. "Do you know Lelia Bryan?" they asked. "No, I don't,"

the proprietor replied. The agents produced a photograph of Mrs. Bryan. "Have you ever seen this woman before?" The druggist studied the picture. "Yes, I think I have. I remember her because she came in here to buy something only a doctor or a nurse can buy without a prescription." "And what was that?" "Bichloride of mercury. And that, as you know, is poison." "A very painful poison," one agent commented. "Do you remember when she bought the bichloride of mercury?" The proprietor thought a minute. "It was back in the spring sometime. May, I guess." "She must have signed your register." "Oh, yes," the druggist agreed. "All doctors and nurses sign. I see to it that they obey the law." He produced the register and thumbed back through the pages. "Here it is. May 10th, bichloride of mercury, purchased by --" He stopped. "But her name isn't Lelia Bryan." The agents stared at the register. "It's Cora Hollis!" "But," the druggist protested, "I don't understand. If you're holding a picture of Lelia Bryan, I'm certain that was Lelia Bryan who came in here and bought the poison." "You're not mistaken," the SBI man assured him. "Mrs. Bryan is tall and dark. Cora Hollis is a short blond. Besides, I'm pretty sure our handwriting expert will tell us this is Lelia Bryan's handwriting. Lelia Bryan came in here on May 10th and signed Cora Hollis' name when she purchased the bichloride of mercury." "But why would she do that?" "That's what we'd like to know," the agent replied.

When the SBI men confronted Cora Hollis with their latest discovery, she was astonished. She declared that she knew nothing about Lelia's strange purchase. "Do you think she might have been planning suicide?" "No," Cora said. "Even if she were, she wouldn't kill her own baby. And it takes a lot of courage to swallow bichloride of mercury." "Is there any reason why Lelia might leave her husband? Another man?" "There was no other man in Lelia's life," Cora answered with conviction, "Only Edis." Cora sighed heavily. "Personally, I think you should stop looking for Lelia. She and the baby must be dead, or they certainly would have turned up by now." "Miss Hollis, we will never give up. So long as Lelia and Mary Rachel are missing, you can be sure the SBI will carry the case in its active file," the agents stated.

However, Cora Hollis was not alone in her feeling that Lelia and her child would never be seen alive again. In December, Edis Bryan subleased his house in Carolina Beach, retaining a small room in the basement for himself. Lelia's relatives and

friends also began to give up hope. Only the SBI continued to carry on its search, believing that somewhere, somehow, there must be an answer to the baffling puzzle. Then suddenly, on August 23rd, 1949, eight years after Lelia Bryan had vanished, news reached the State Bureau of Investigation in Raleigh which reopened the Bryan case. The warden of the state prison in Raiford, Florida, notified James Powell, director of the North Carolina SBI, that a prison inmate, a native of North Carolina, had just confessed to the murder of Lelia and Mary Rachel Bryan.

According to the warden, a convict, Jack Vickers, told his cellmate the story. (*Jack Vickers is also a fictitious name given to protect the person's identity.*) The cellmate repeated the story to the warden. When the warden questioned Vickers, the prisoner related that he was living at Carolina Beach at the time and around nine o'clock on the evening of May 10th, 1941, he was strolling along the boardwalk, when he noticed a Ford coupe parked near the shore. A woman and a small child were in the car. Vickers jumped into the auto, drew a gun and directed the woman to drive to Silver Lake, which lies between Carolina Beach and Wilmington. "Then," Vickers confessed, "I parked the car. Lelia Bryan and I got out. Mrs. Bryan started to run away. I ran after her. I grabbed her by her long, black hair and attacked her. Then I stabbed her with a knife. When I realized she was dead, I took the baby and drowned it." Vickers promised to describe further details if the authorities would take him back to North Carolina and let him show them the scene of the crime.

Director Powell sent an agent down to Raiford to take Vickers into custody and bring him north. Vickers cooperated fully, describing the Ford coupe, even repeating the license number and the engine number. He led the SBI men to Silver Lake, pointed out the approximate spot where he had attacked and killed Lelia Bryan. He wasn't exactly sure where he had hidden the body, he said, but he pointed to a cluster of bushes. "I threw her in some bushes like, those." "What did you do with the car?" "I'll show you," Vickers said.

He asked the agents to drive him to nearby Cape Fear River. He got out of their auto and surveyed a particular location. "Yes, just about here," he declared. "I drove up over this bank. Then I put the car in neutral. I jumped out and pushed it over."

While Vickers was held in jail in Raleigh. SBI agents went to work to verify the convict's story. They combed the area around Silver Lake for the remains of Lelia Bryan and, after several weeks, were baffled to find no trace of her body. They hired divers to explore the depths of Cape Fear River to locate the Ford coupe. The divers worked three days and finally reported there was absolutely no automobile on the river's bed.

Confronted with these facts. Jack Vickers admitted, "I'm sorry. It was all a hoax. I never laid eyes on Lelia Bryan or Mary Rachel in my life. All I know about them was what I read in the Wilmington papers. They kept reprinting the case for several years. It impressed me. I remembered the license and engine numbers. I was getting homesick for the old Tar Heel state and bored staying in Raiford. I just figured if I made this phony confession it'd be a good chance to get out for a spell and see North Carolina again."

Jack Vickers was transferred back to the Florida penitentiary to serve out the rest of his term. His hoax cost the state of North Carolina over a thousand dollars. In February, 1951, a fisherman caught his line on something in Lake James, near Morgantown, several hundred miles from Carolina Beach. A swimmer dove down, thought he saw an automobile in the water and notified the SBI. Powell hired a professional diver to investigate and when the report came that the car in the river was an old Ford coupe, it was hauled out. The auto turned out to be a Ford coupe, but it was a 1934 model. Edis Bryan's Ford had been a 1935, and the engine numbers of the two cars didn't match. "But we're still working on the Bryan' case," SBI Director Powell recently stated. "Even if thirteen years have gone by, a woman, a child, and an automobile just don't evaporate into thin air. There's an answer somewhere. We'll keep searching until we find it."

- 5-12 OFFICERS SEARCH W? WILMINGTON STAR
- 6-22 SBI PASSES HUNT N+O NEWS TO OBSERVE
- 6-22 DISAPPEARANCE W
- 6-24 FOUL PLAY W
- 6-24 BODIES SOUGHT N+O
- 6-25 SOLDIERS AHEAD W?
- 6-24 MISSING COUPLE N+O
- 7-1 CCC CAMPS N+O
- 7-29 MRS BRYAN ?

CAR 219-056 ENG. 18-1533996

2-42 JOURNAL OF NURSING

6-23-43 WOMAN MISSING N+O

8-10-45 DISCHARGE CASE

5-18-49 WHAT HAPPEN N+O

7-15-49 YOUTH GIVEN N+O

9-7-49 DOUBLE MURDER N+O

MYSTERY OF LELIA ?

PICTURE OF WEBSTER

8-24-49 SOLVED?

EIGHT YEAR OLD MYSTERY

5-11-49 LELIA BRYAN W JACK VICKERS

4-10-56 SKELETONS FOUND W CONFESSED

UNCOVERED SKELETONS

4-24 NEW HAMPSHIRE BONES NOT N+O

6-24-41 STATE AGENTS HAVE W

6-24-41 BODIES SOUGHT N+O

5-24-41 PICTURES N+O

9-54? TRUE DETECTIVE

9-MAR 64 OLD UNSOLVED CASES N+O

3 BIZARRE TAR HEAL MURDERS

1956 2 BODIES

# Florida Officials Launch Search For Missing Lelia Bryan, Daughter 7-28-41

## NIPPON TROOPS TAKE OVER BASES

### Trucks Arrive in Indo-China With Thousands Of Japanese Soldiers

(By The Associated Press)  
 SAIGON, French Indo-China, July 28.—(AP)—Japanese troops moved toward their new Indo-China bases by land and sea today under a Tokyo-Vichy agreement giving them use of this French possession's roads and possibly railroads.

Four transports and four destroyers were expected here Wednesday

(Continued on Page Two; Col. 2)

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla., July 28. If Mrs. Lelia Bryan and her four-year-old daughter, Mary Rachel, missing for nearly four months from their Carolina Beach, N. C., home are in this vicinity and aren't found it won't be because of lack of publicity and intensive police search.

A request of the Wilmington Star-News at Wilmington, N. C., that a search be instituted for the pair because they had been reported in this area was initiated today when an unusual tri-county dragnet was spread along the western Florida coast.

Chief of Police Joe Russell of Clearwater, Fla., who received the request of the newspaper at Wilmington, brought the matter to the attention of state, county and city authorities all along this particular section.

As a result, officers have been and still are keeping a close watch

for a woman and a child answering the Bryan descriptions. In addition, radio stations at Sarasota and Bradenton in Manatee county, Tampa in Hillsboro county and Clearwater and St. Petersburg in Pinellas county have brought the matter to the attention of their listeners, seeking immediate information as to the possible whereabouts of the woman and child.

According to information received at Clearwater the missing woman and child were reported in Wilmington as having been seen in the Pinellas county seat. Should this report be true it is believed that the publicity given the case in this section will locate or at least bring some trace of them.

Investigation, said authorities, will be facilitated since this is an exceedingly quiet season along the coast with practically no tourists in the vicinity.

## Aid Of Troops Asked In Search Of Woman, Child

RALEIGH, June 23.—(AP)—Frederick C. Handy, director of the State Bureau of Investigation, today requested aid by Federal troops in a search of a swampy woodland near Wilmington for the bodies of a 36-year-old woman and her four year old child, who, Handy said, mysteriously disappeared from Carolina Beach on the night of May 10.

The director identified the two as Mrs. E. C. Bryan and her daughter, Mary Rachel.

He said they left their home to buy supplies from a grocery store, but never reached the store and have not been heard from since. This long silence, he added, has convinced officials of foul play.

Handy expressed the opinion that the solution to the mystery would be found in a remote area of swamps and woods, in the area of Wilmington, Carolina Beach, and Camp Davis.

In a telegram to the War department, Handy asked that authority be given for the commandant at Camp Davis to assign about 200 soldiers to assist in the hunt.

He described Mrs. Bryan as being slender, five feet seven inches tall, and weighing 120 to 125 pounds, with dark brown hair and dark eyes.

## MOTHER, CHILD MISSING



Object of a nation-wide hunt following their mysterious disappearance from their Carolina Beach home on May 10 are Mrs. E. C. Bryan and her four-year-old daughter, Mary Rachel (shown above). New Hanover county authorities are baffled by the disappearance. The husband and father, an Atlantic Coast Line freight office employe, has offered a reward of \$100 for information leading to the location of his wife and child.

## SBI PICKS TERRITORY TO SEARCH FOR COUPLE

The State Bureau of Investigation yesterday mapped an area seven miles long and about two miles wide to be searched for clues to the disappearance of Mrs. Lelia Bryan.

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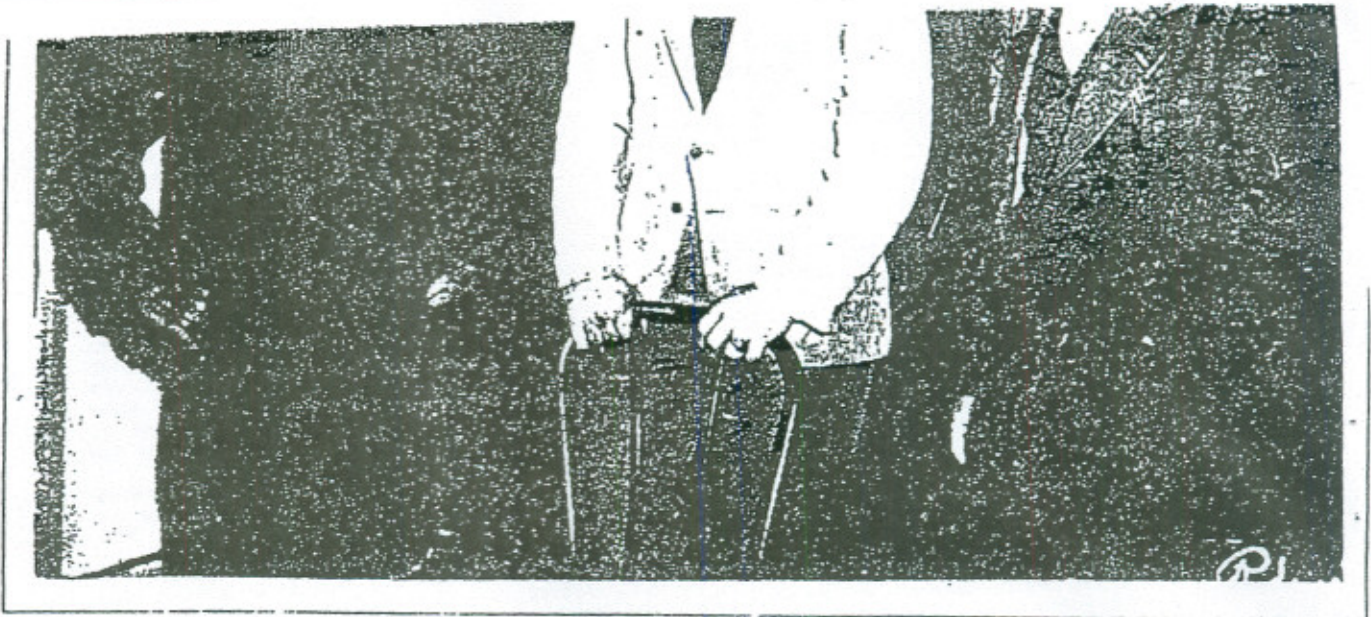
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## Page murder case solved

*The sensational U. S. Page murder case was brought to a successful conclusion in 1952 when Walter Sawyer, left, confessed to the crime. He was sentenced to 25-30 years for killing the well-known Bladen legislator. Sawyer was a share cropper on Page-owned land, and claimed that Page cheated him. Pictured with Sawyer are, from the left, SBI Agents James Bradshaw and Clyde Fentress, and Sheriff John B. Allen.*

Bladen Tire Company and a garage owned by Greene Brothers Lumber Company, causing an estimated \$150,000 in damages.

The fire spread so rapidly that a fire truck owned by the Lumber company was burned before it could be removed from the garage.

A home about 50 feet from the blaze caught fire several times but the fire department was able to get those flames under control.

### "Sleeping sickness" hits county

During a one-week span six horses in Bladen County died of Equine Encephalitis (sleeping sickness). In Columbus County 25 to 30 horses and mules were dying each day.

The disease can be transmitted to humans by mosquitoes. Julius Thompson was transported from Bladen County Hospital to Chapel Hill Hospital in critical condition after being diagnosed with the illness.

There was no preventive vaccine available for humans, but there were for horses. Sleeping sickness was an inflammation of the brain.

## 1956

### Skeletons of missing couple found

A 15-year-old mystery was solved when the skeletons of Leila Lewis Bryan and her four-year-old daughter were found near Carolina Beach.

The two Bladenboro natives had not been seen since May 10, 1941 when they left their Carolina Beach summer home to go grocery shopping.

A Carolina Beach zoo keeper, George Tregendo, had discovered the skeletons while chasing a pony running along a road near the Cape Fear River.

Much speculation had been made about the very highly publicized case. Reports of sighting the two had come from all across the country.

A Florida convict was arrested in 1949 and confessed to the murders, but later retracted his statement.

### Clarkton residents protest road changes

Several Clarkton residents, including Mayor Lem Smith, protested to Governor Luther Hodges about the proposed Highway 701 by-pass around Clarkton.

The highway was later built despite the opposition.

### KKK meets at Bladenboro

The Ku Klux Klan held its first public meeting in Bladen County in several years. The Bladenboro gathering was a bid for new members.

Klan officials, complete with white robes and conical hats, met on a vacant lot adjacent to Bud Edwards' store and crowds of the curious, variously estimated from 500 to 2,000, listened to the unidentified Klansmen speaking for white supremacy and segregation.

Membership applications were passed out, but according to those who attended the rally, not many new mem-

(More of the Fifties on page 112)



ter Eight Years

3-13-49

# Odd Disappearance Case Still A Puzzle

BY REESE HART.

WILMINGTON, March 12.—Almost eight years have passed since Mrs. Lelia Bryan and her daughter disappeared mysteriously from Carolina Beach, but the case remains as strange and baffling today as when first reported to police.

Mrs. Bryan, an attractive, 36-year-old former trained nurse, and her four-year-old child, Mary Rachel, left their Carolina Beach home at 9 o'clock the night of May 10, 1941, to drive to the resort's business district to buy an item of wearing apparel. No trace of them has ever been found.

## MURDER OR SUICIDE?

Was the mother and daughter slain? If so, what became of the 1935 Ford coupe they were riding in when they left home? More important, who was the killer? What was the motive? If they weren't murdered, did Mrs. Bryan end her life and that of her daughter by driving the car into the Cape Fear river?

These and many other questions have bobbed up in the passing years to test the best detective minds in the state. Today, the case remains unsolved and stands as one of North Carolina's major mysteries of all time.

The missing woman's husband, E. C. Bryan, an employe of the Atlantic Coast Line railroad, reported to police that he had been busy making concrete forms in the basement of his beach cottage preparatory to pouring cement when his wife came home from the beach at 6:30 o'clock that Saturday night and prepared supper.

## LEFT FOR STORE.

Bryan also reported to police that his wife told him she was going to the new five-and-ten-cent store at the beach to buy a brassiere. Her daughter gleefully asked permission to accompany her. Bryan said his wife and child left about 9 o'clock in their car, but they never came back. He said his wife left several things behind that she had just taken off of her fingers, and that she was wearing a summer print dress, brown and white shoes, minus any hose, and a green turban. She was five feet, eight inches tall and weighed 128 pounds.

Bryan told police that after his wife and daughter left, he went to bed and was awakened sometime later by the arrival of his wife's brother, Berry Lewis, and a companion from Bladenboro. Lewis inquired about his sister and was told that she had gone to the dime store. Bryan said his brother-in-law left and returned sometime later, arousing him again. He reported to Bryan that he had found no trace of Mrs. Bryan, Mary Rachel, or the car.

## CALLS IN POLICE.

Alarmed over their whereabouts, Bryan said he reported the matter to Chief of Police Ed Leonard of Carolina Beach, who instituted an immediate search for the car and the mother and child.

By Sunday morning, sheriff's deputies, State Highway patrolmen and many beach residents had joined in the widespread search. The edge of the beach was combed, as were the nearby moss-festooned streams and thick woodland. By plane, by foot and by car, the search was pressed through the day, but to no avail. Not a single clue could be uncovered that might shed light on their whereabouts.

Detailed descriptions of them were dispatched to neighboring states. Every State Highway patrolman in North Carolina was alerted for the 1935 Ford coupe bearing the license number 219-058. Officers in neighboring counties began a search for the missing pair.

Sheriff C. David Jones, now deceased, assigned Deputy Sheriff Porter Davis, now sheriff, fulltime to the case. He was given valuable aid by Sgt. J. R. Smith of the State Highway patrol, since promoted to captain, and Harry Fales, head of the City-County Bureau of Identification.

Theorizing that Mrs. Bryan might have gone to Bladenboro to visit relatives, officers began a check of all service stations leading to Wilmington from Carolina Beach. This was done to determine whether she had bought any gasoline, for the car contained only a small amount when she drove it away, it was reported. However, they were unable to pick up her trail. Officers extended the canvass to filling stations north and west of Wilmington, but they met with no luck. No one recalled seeing the Ford coupe or the woman and child.

## SUICIDE PLUNGE?

Had Mrs. Bryan, in a moment of frenzied despondency, driven the car into the Cape Fear river in a suicide plunge? Armed with draghooks, workers probed the muddy depths of the river at the foot of Red Cross street here and at several other deep points, but they met with no luck.

The search for the missing vehicle was extended throughout the eastern seaboard. The State Bureau of Investigation, called in on the case, assigned Agent James F. Bradshaw, Jr., to the investigation. Bradshaw, an airplane pilot himself, scoured the countryside by plane, but could find nothing of value. It was as if the earth had opened up and swallowed the mother and child—and car.

Were they slain and the car dismantled and destroyed? If the car was not taken apart and done away with it piece by piece, did the canny killer dispose of their bodies in a well-hidden grave and then drive the car into the inland waterway near the beach? Several officers hold to the latter theory, pointing out that the briny water would have aided in disintegration of the vehicle.

At the time of their disappearance, a large sewer pipeline was being dug at Carolina Beach, and there are officers who hold to the belief that the mother and child were killed and their bodies dumped

into the deep pipeline and covered up. But it still sees the question—what happened to the car?

Another possibility is that Mrs. Bryant might have driven the car

into the inland waterway, thus killing herself and her daughter.

What really happened to Lelia Bryan and her child—and the car—may never be known.

I never heard of the bill, at having any county names in. Soles said.

Lee said he inadvertently Columbus County in the introduced the bill at the request of Sen. Block," Sen. Lee felt that he, because of legal ties, should not introduce the bill.

interview before the Senate. Sen. Soles said that Sen. Block told him that he "could not refer" who asked him to introduce the bill.

even if it has some merit, it's going to get through. I'm not going to play that game," Sen. Soles said. "I am positive that something is going on under the table, but I have not been able to find out who's under the table to speak. Things like this happen unless somebody's going to do it with it."

## INSIDE

# State acts to restrict development

State Environmental Management Commission moved forward Thursday with legislation to restrict development and the state's surface water resources. **Page 3B**

drive home the magnitude of the state's injury problem.

"One of the things that we need to do in this area is to get people out of the mentality of thinking about injuries as accidents," said Carol

WILMINGTON

## CAROLINA BEACH

5-10-91

# Mystery disappearance marks 50th anniversary

By KIRSTEN B. MITCHELL

Staff Writer

Half a century ago, Carolina Beach resident Lelia Lewis Bryan, 36, and her 4-year-old daughter, Mary Rachel, stepped out of their beach home one May evening around 9 p.m. They climbed into a 1935 Ford coupe and drove toward a nearby grocery store.

The mother and daughter never arrived at the store and no trace of them — or the car — has ever been found. Despite massive manhunt and investigations, their disappearance has baffled the State Bureau of Investigation and relatives of the woman and child.

Today marks the 50th anniversary of their disappearance. Mrs. Bryan's nephew, Lewis Smith, holds little hope that the mystery of his vanished aunt and cousin will ever be solved. The 48-year-old man said he was born almost two years after their disappearance.

Six weeks after the disappearance, SBI detectives in Raleigh said

they suspected foul play. A number of theories were brought forth, but none could ever be proved.

The theories behind the disappearance include Mrs. Bryan driving the car into Snows Cut, or a murderer who buried them with sewer lines in Carolina Beach and drove the car into Snows Cut.

Mr. Lewis leans toward the sewer line theory. In 1987, Mr. Lewis learned that an engineer with the Army Corps of Engineers who was supervising the sewer line project was shot in the neck and killed 18 months after the disappearance. A month after Mr. Lewis learned that, he met the dead man's son.

"He said, 'You don't know the pain that has caused my daddy,'" Mr. Lewis said. The man told Mr. Lewis that his father, as a supervisor on the sewer line project, walked up on two contract workers burying a woman and a young girl.

"He thinks whoever killed my aunt and niece killed his father or drove him to kill himself," Mr. Lewis said.

— were the leading causes of injury deaths in 1988, the report says. Motor vehicle accidents killed 1,598 people.

Please see INJURIES on page 5E



## Wet work

Kenneth Guyton of Propst from under a cardboard box rain Thursday to put down Long Beach.



BAYAN HOUSE  
CAROLINA BEACH

692 8084

**Mrs. Lena M. Smith**

LAURINBURG — Mrs. Lena Mae Smith, 75, of 605 Wagram St. died Saturday.

Born in Robeson County, she was a daughter of the late Tom and Rachel Quick Leviner and a retired textile employee.

Funeral services will be conducted today at 3 p.m. at East Laurinburg Church of God by the Revs. R.P. Fields and Randall Snead, directed by Butler Funeral Home. Burial will be in Hillside Memorial Park.

Surviving are her sons Paul, Willie, Everett and Clarence Smith Jr., all of Laurinburg; daughter Evelyn Troublefield of Fairmont; brother Eugene Leviner of Rockingham; 13 grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

**John L. Ponzer**

SOUTHERN PINES — John Lewis Ponzer, 76, of 295 Hillside Road died Saturday in Moore Regional Hospital in Pinehurst.

He was a retired assistant lighting specialist will Carolina Power & Light Company.

Funeral services will be conducted Tuesday at 11 a.m. at Emmanuel Episcopal Church by the Revs. Samuel Walker and Fred Thompson, directed by Powell Funeral Home.

Surviving are his wife Willetta Woody Ponzer and his daughters Grace and Janet Ponzer, both of Cary.

Memorials may be made to Sandhills Hospice Inc., P.O. Box 1376, Southern Pines 28388 or the American Heart Association, P.O. Box 147, Southern Pines 28388.

**Gray M. Hall**

HOPE MILLS — Gray M. Hall, 71, of 5514-C Country Place died Saturday.

Funeral services will be conducted Tuesday at 2 p.m. at Southview Baptist Church by the Rev. Ned Webb. Burial will be in LaFayette Memorial Park.

Surviving are his brother Earnie Hall of Autryville and his sister Elizabeth Hudson of Fayetteville.

The family will receive friends tonight from 7 to 9 at Reeves Funeral Home and other times at the home of Myrtle Hodges, 5514-C Country Place, Hope Mills.

**Mrs. Effie V. Wade**

LILLINGTON — Mrs. Effie V. "Tootsie" Wade, 66, of Route 2 died Sunday.

Funeral services will be conducted Tuesday at 11 a.m. at Spring Hill United Methodist Church by the Revs. Lester Bisette and Jeff Roberts. Burial will be in the church cemetery.

Surviving are her husband Clifford L. "Jack" Wade; daughters Sylvia Bellflower, Phyllis Gwartney and Brenda Wade, all of Lillington; son Billy Wade of Lillington; sisters Pauline Caviness, Callie May and Vera Harrington, all of Sanford; brothers Ruppert and Stencil Spivey, both of Sanford, and Trenton Spivey of Maryland; and seven grandchildren.

The family will receive friends tonight from 7 to 9 at O'Quinn Funeral Home. Memorials may be made to the American Heart Foundation.

**Infant Leggett**

LAURINBURG — Lakandra Leggett, infant daughter of Shirley Leggett, of 141-C Highland Village, died Saturday.

Arrangements will be announced by Jackson Funeral Home.

**Mrs. Caroline R. Dellinger**

IVANHOE — Mrs. Caroline Robinson Dellinger, 94, of Delta Ivanhoe died Sunday at her home.

She was a native of Delta Ivanhoe and a retired school teacher.

Funeral services will be conducted Wednesday at 2 p.m. at Black River Presbyterian Church by the Revs. Phillip Thatford and Walter Hartman, directed by Crumpler Honeycutt Funeral Home in Clinton. Burial will be in the church cemetery.

Surviving are her daughter Ann D. Keller of Syracuse, N.Y., and her great-grandson Aaron Keller of Syracuse.

The family will receive friends at the home.

**William H. Hagin**

PINEBLUFF — William Henry Hagin, 76, died Saturday in Moore Regional Hospital in Pinehurst.

A retired Farmer from Anson County, he moved to Pinebluff in 1980 and was a member of Taylor Memorial Baptist Church in the Roseland Community.

Funeral services will be conducted Tuesday at 3 p.m. at Faith Baptist Church in Lilesville. Burial will be in the church cemetery.

Surviving are his sons Charles T.

**Mrs. Lucille Coplin**

SANFORD — Mrs. Lucille Coplin, 69, of 2855 Seawell St. died Sunday in Central Carolina Hospital.

Arrangements will be announced by Watson Mortuary.

**Robert T. Hammonds**

CHADBOURN — Robert Tiffany Hammonds, 68, died Sunday in Columbus County Hospital in Whiteville.

Funeral services will be conducted Wednesday at 2 p.m. at Corinth Baptist Church by the Revs. J.P. Williams and Boyd Williamson. Burial will be in Simmons family cemetery.

Surviving are his wife Peggy Moser Hammonds; son Robert W. Hammonds of the home; daughter Wanda K. Soles and Debbie Norris, both of Whiteville, and Zeda Hathway of Summerland Key, Fla.; stepdaughters Catherine and Jennifer Ward, both of the home, and Janice Strickland of Cerro Gordo; brother Irvin R. Hammonds of Chadbourn; sisters Mary Gerrall of Chadbourn and Doris Walters of Fairmont; nine grandchildren; and ten great-grandchildren.

The family will receive friends Tuesday from 7 to 9 p.m. at Mercer-Worthington Funeral Home.

**Mrs. Melba G. Pait**

BLADENBORO — Mrs. Melba Guiton Pait, 66, died Sunday in Wilmington Hospital.

Funeral services will be conducted Tuesday at 2 p.m. at Center Roads Baptist Church by the Rev. Earl Henry. Burial will be in New Pait Cemetery.

Surviving are her sons Robert Pait of Lumberton, Terry Pait of Shallotte and Timmy Pait of Dublin; daughters Mrs. Bill Kucejko of Elizabethtown, Elsie Pulley of Lumberton and Bardie Batton and Ginger Parks, both of Bladenboro; sisters Lucy Price, Thelma Brisson and Fodie Edwards, all of Bladenboro, Lydia Edge of Dublin and Laura Jackson of Tennessee; nine grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

The family will receive friends tonight from 7 to 9 at Lewis Funeral Home.

**Mrs. Mildred T. Powers**

ST. PAULS — Mrs. Mildred Townsend Powers, 79, died Sunday.

Arrangements will be announced by McNeill Funeral Home.

level died Saturday. Funeral 1 p.m. at Burial in LaFayette Memorial Park in

formerly of Whiteville, died Tuesday.

**Cheney Arrives**

In Philippines

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# OLD NEWS PRESS

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S. B. I. CASE UNSOLVED

November 13, 2000

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## You be the detective on the Lelia Bryan Unsolved Mystery Case of 1941

In 1941 the State Bureau of Investigation was newly created. Before the days of "High Tech" and before communication flowed with alacrity it was hit with a case that has persistently defied solution over almost sixty years. It relates to the disappearance, at Carolina Beach, of Lelia Lewis Bryan and her four year old daughter, Mary Rachel Bryan on May 10<sup>th</sup> of 1941.

The facts are so simple, one would think a solution would have been quickly found. A mother was missing, her daughter was missing, and an object as big as a car was

missing. There is no certainty as to where mother, daughter or car was. The search has delivered exhaustion but no certainty of evidence. The effort to find Lelia Mary Rachel and the car was thorough. The effort produced only weariness, news articles and theories. The following information is all we have of effort to uncover this mystery. Become your own Sherlock Holmes and see how well you can do to unravel this unsolved mystery.

Lelia's hometown was Bladenboro and her high school annual, "The Adventurer" in 1923 said, "Lelia—the kind of friend who sympathizes, loves, forgives, forgets and understands. If it is fun you are up to Lelia is with you. If you are down and out, go to Lelia. She will make you laugh whether you feel like it or not." Lelia was

"Poetess of the Senior" class and a Member of the O'Henry Literary Society" and Manager of the Basketball Club in 1921 and 1922.

Lelia finished Bladenboro High School and entered nurse's training at James Walker Memorial Hospital in Wilmington. Hearsay has it that an Eddie C.

Bryan was brought into E.R. one night having been shot in the leg by an irate husband. Lelia fell in love with him and they were married. Mache Lewis, Lelia's mother would not allow him in her house, for he had been divorced. He was from White Oak, North Carolina and Carl Bryan was his brother. Eddie C. Bryan worked for the Atlantic Seaboard Coastline Railroad out of Wilmington.

Lelia was 36 in May 10<sup>th</sup> of 1941, and Mary Rachel was four years old. Their home was in Carolina Beach. Her husband, E. C. Bryan said she had told him at 9:00 P.M. that she was going to the new "Five and Dime Store" to buy a bra, and maybe she would stop at the grocery store. Mary Rachel begged to go with her and Lelia took her along. She had left her rings on the kitchen sink. She left her rings on the kitchen sink. Her husband went to bed and went to sleep.

Barry Lewis, brother of Lelia was in Wilmington that night and stopped to see his sister. He awoke her husband and found Lelia was shopping. Eddie told Barry she was wearing summer print dress, brown and white shoes, minus hoes and wearing a green turban. Barry left and returned later to report he had not found Lelia or Mary Rachel or the car.

Eddie C. Bryan was alarmed at the report and called Ed Leonard, Chief of Police at Carolina Beach. A search was begun immediately and found nothing. There was not a trace of mother, daughter or the 1935 Ford coupe.

A full search began and grew in magnitude as the weeks and months went by. A small amount of gas reported in the car, spawned a gas station to station review to see if a woman and four year old girl had bought gas on the night of May 10<sup>th</sup> or the morning following. Officers had pictures to show station managers. It was the time of World War II and gas was rationed. Not one manager reported seeing the pair.

May 28<sup>th</sup> Constable Ezzel of Wilmington told Police Chief Coleman the officers had found some

In this issue...

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tangible clue but did not give the nature of the evidence.

He did say they believed daughter and mother had been in the county since the time of their disappearance. This information was reported in Whiteville on May 28<sup>th</sup> and shows how quickly the search and views about the case had spread. S.B.I. agent James Bradshaw, had flown low level flights over New Hanover county looking for the car. Rivers, waterways, and lakes were given careful scrutiny. There were no signs of the car. Dragging operations in the waterways and rivers did turn up one pane of glass that could have come from a 1935 coupe. But the car was not found. On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1942, 200 soldiers from Camp Davis were asked to aid in the search of remote areas of swamps and woods. Leila was described as being slender, five feet seven inches tall, and weighing 120 to 125 pounds with dark brown hair and dark eyes.

Up the coast as far as New York State, and as far south as Florida agents were on the alert. By July of the following year the N.C. license number, 219-056 was in the mind of all state troopers and even the engine number, 18-1833996 was posted in many repair shops. The Automobile Underwriters Association was notified to watch for the Ford coupe in every state in the nation. The American Journal of Nursing published the picture of the mother and child. A reward of \$100.00 was offered by E.C. Bryan for information as to where they might be.

Barry Lewis, who was a deputy sheriff in Bladen County, took a leave of absence to join in the futile search. In the Bladen Journal's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, of November 1999 on page 111, it was reported that the skeletons of Leila Lewis Bryan and her daughter had been found near Carolina Beach in 1956. A Carolina Beach zoo keeper had discovered the skeletons while chasing a pony running along a road near the Cape Fear River. This was not true for the bones have been tested and proven to be Negro. So the search continues.