

*A Halloween Tale of a Haunted House and a Redding Man Driven Insane;  
Wreaking Havoc, Murder, and Suicide in October 1926  
(beware: not for the faint of heart)*

By  
Chet Sunde, Psy.D.



ENSLOW / BILLIARD / PARLOR / REDDING, CALIF. // GOOD FOR / 10¢ / IN TRADE

This is a token I purchased from Ralph Hollibaugh in August of 2006. While researching it's history, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the owner of the billiard parlor, Claud V. Enslow (he didn't spell his name Claude), and his family had lived just five houses down from my own office, at 1352 Oregon Street, the northwest corner of Tehama and Oregon:



The next surprise was to find that this was the former site of the first hospital in Redding, a large three story building at 321 Oregon Street (the 1930 Sanborn Map shows that the street addresses had been changed from three to four digits):



The Redding Hospital was in operation (pun acknowledged) from circa 1884 to 1904, after the new County

Hospital had opened on the present site of the Shasta County Health Department, south of town on Breslauer Way. After the Redding Hospital closed, its abandoned shell was known for years as a haunted house, until it was torn down circa 1920, pictured below. (Imagine the music from *Phantom of the Opera* playing in the background). It does look a bit spooky, doesn't it? A bit too much like the abandoned mansion in Stephen King's thriller, *Salem's Lot*.



Getting back to the token, the billiard parlor was located at 506 Market Street, in the left half of the Jacobson building (and Moose Hall), and across from the IOOF building which still stands (readers may remember that this was the old Stationers Office supply by the 1960's). Enslow proudly opened his new billiard parlor on Halloween day, 1925:



Halloween (also known as All Hallows Evening or All Hallows' Eve) has its origins in the ancient Celtic festival

known as Samhain, a celebration of the end of the harvest season in Gaelic culture. Samhain was a time used by the ancient pagans to take stock of supplies and prepare for winter. The ancient Gaels believed that on October 31, the boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead overlapped, and that the deceased would come back to life and wreak havoc on the living. Masks and costumes were worn in an attempt to appease or confuse the evil spirits, and thus avoid their mayhem.

One final curiosity I found in my research was that both Claud and his wife Ruth's death dates were almost exactly one year later, and separated by one day: Claud on October 29, 1926; Ruth on October 30, 1926 (it turns out that their deaths were just moments apart, and near midnight, so in different reports are listed on the same date). I knew that something strange must have happened, and discovered the horrible tale when I searched for their obituaries. Perhaps, like the plot of a Stephen King novel, having such a grand opening on Halloween day angered the spirits that still haunted the grounds upon which Claud Enslow's new home sat. In any case, the biggest (and most unpleasant) surprise to this story was yet to come; neither Claud nor his wife would see another Halloween from this side of the doorway between the living and the dead:

*The Searchlight, October 30, 1926--*



*The terrible tragedy was enacted at about the hour of 11 last night at their home at the corner of Oregon and Tehama streets. They had just retired when the husband, with deliberation, as circumstances indicate, took two revolvers and fired three shots that brought death to both in a very few minutes, if not seconds.*

*It was a few minutes before the awful news spread to the neighborhood. A call was sent to the police department and Enslow's pool room down town. Patrolman Henry Seng was in the pool room at the time. Another call went out for a physician and Dr. C. A. Mueller responded, accompanied by Heinie Klaukens.*

#### *House In Darkness*

*They found the house in darkness except for a light in the rear. They did not know what had happened, but knew there had been a shooting. They waited for the arrival of Seng and City Marshal W. E. Smith.*

*Entering the premises, the four went to the bedroom of the couple in the back part of the house, where was revealed a sight that made them shudder. Mr. and Mrs. Enslow, bathed in large pools of blood, were already ghastly in the electric light and their bodies nearly cold. The doctor's ministrations were without avail, for the bullets, as nearly as could be determined, had penetrated the heart. The smell of smoke was still in the air. Mrs. Enslow, an attractive woman, was even more beautiful in death.*

#### *Leaves Notes and Letter*

*The slayer must have been calm and deliberate. He had placed every thing in the room in order, as he had previously done his business and personal affairs (when an employee had asked if he would be able to get off early the next day, Enslow told him "That will be all right...everything will be fixed so you can go"). His money was neatly arranged in a pile on the bureau, and with it two notes and a letter, the last addressed to Ed S. Reynolds, a close friend of the family.*

*The notes were brief but they gave explicit directions. They were not addressed to any person. One said that the writer was to kill himself and Ruth Enslow; that he had not found happiness here and hoped that it might be somewhere else. The letter to Reynolds was cordial and contained a suggestion of gayety. It said that Reynolds might have a case of wine that was left in the house, so that he could drink to the health of his friend.*

#### *Death's Hand at Poker*

*At the inquest were revealed the final details of the domestic tragedy that shocked the city. Enslow had definitely planned the deed for a week, and may have had the idea of it in mind for several weeks. He very carefully carried out his designs, hinting rather broadly to an acquaintance that he was to do something unusual. Hardly anybody guessed the worst, not even Mrs. Enslow, who went to her home for the last time Friday night in fine spirits. Her husband had*

threatened her but the fear of these threats had at least partly subsided. Enslow himself, while acting queerly at times, in the last few hours before the tragedy sat for a while in a poker game and later tuned in the radio at his home, where his daughter had company, and seemed inclined to be sociable.

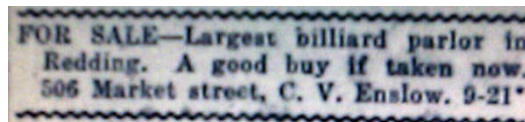


#### Returns From Theater

Mrs. Enslow had just returned home from the Redding Theater, where by herself she had witnessed, by strange coincidence, a dramatic photoplay, "The Havoc," dealing with marital unhappiness.

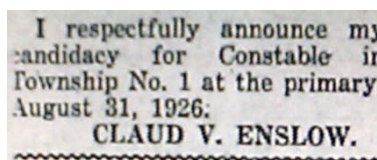
#### Had Family Controversies

Friends of Mrs. Enslow stated last night that she and her husband had had bitter controversies over a period of several months, and that they had reached the stage of personal combat on several occasions. He threatened to do the deed that finally came to pass, but it seems that Mrs. Enslow had not been afraid. It is believed that the man's mind had been weakened under strain and cares. His venture in business was not a success. For a month past Enslow had been endeavoring to dispose of his billiard parlor and club rooms at 506 Market street. The attempt was unsuccessful.



#### Was Candidate for Constable

During the recent primary campaign Enslow was a candidate for the nomination for constable of Redding township. He entered the campaign at a late hour and received a comparatively small vote.



#### Mrs. Enslow Prominent Socially

Mrs. Enslow was prominent in social circles in the city. She was for a long time employed with the Market Street Theater, where she sold tickets and alternately presided at the piano.

#### Had Quarreled

*Prior to this ghastly scene there had been a bitter quarrel between husband and wife, with recriminations. It started when Enslow, who had been somewhat impatiently awaiting his wife's return from the theater, finally encountered here in his daughter's bedroom, where the two were chatting. He seized Mrs. Enslow roughly and there were harsh words between them. He struck here and the daughter intervened, using her own hands to help her mother in the struggle and begging the father not to do an injury. Finally Enslow picked his wife up in his arms and transported her to their own bedroom. He closed the door against his daughter, who returned to her own room. She relates that the talking subsided somewhat and she hoped this was to end the quarrel, but it was only a short time after that that she heard the shots.*

*Mrs. Enslow when she came home found her daughter with young Gimblin. She passed a few remarks and said that she had thought "Havoc" was a good play. She went to her bedroom. Later the husband came to the front of the house and stood behind the portieres near where Helen and Gimblin sat. "Have you gone to bed, Helen?" he asked. Learning that she had not he said no more. Fifteen minutes later Gimblin went home, Mrs. Enslow joined her daughter in the front of the house and the hour for the enactment of the tragedy drew near.*

#### *Her Last Words*

*"Claude, oh, Claude!" These were the last words ever spoken by Mrs. Enslow, according to the testimony of her young daughter Helen, in an affidavit made by her and read to the coroner's jury. Deputy Coroner Roy C. Weekly deemed it better to save the hysterical child from a public appearance.*

*The girl had dashed into the smoke filled bedroom where her father and mother were, after hearing shots that she said sounded to her like the crack of a blacksnake. Her father was standing with revolver in hand. Mrs. Enslow was sitting on the edge of the bed, clasping a bleeding breast. "Claude, oh, Claude," she cried, and as Helen rushed up and embraced her she tried to say more, according to the girl's testimony, but was unable to do so. Enslow fired one more shot at his wife, which it is believed went wild, but she rolled to the floor, from which her daughter partly lifted her to the bed. Helen then rushed out of the house and six blocks away to the home of her young friend, Bert Gimblin, where she hysterically told what had happened and then fainted away. Her clothes were nearly drenched with her mother's blood.*

*The child had interceded with the father to spare her mother but without avail. After firing the final shot at his wife the maddened husband jumped into bed, pulled the bed clothes over himself and committed suicide with one shot.*

#### *Telephoned to Oroville*

*The coolness and determination of the husband is shown by the fact that he telephoned about an hour before the shooting to Allen Cunningham, a friend in Oroville, asking him to inform his mother, Mrs. Nellie S. Enslow, that he had taken his life. Cunningham did not know what to do and telephoned to Redding for verification. He decided not to arouse the aged parent out of bed for the terrible news but waited till morning.*

*One of the Enslow notes was addressed to the public. It was short, "I am going to kill Ruth Enslow," it said, "and then end my own life. I wish that we be buried in Oroville, where my sister is buried. I cannot stand this any longer."*

While this tale reads somewhat like a Stephen King thriller, timely for some Halloween chills in 2013, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that it is not fiction (except maybe for the haunted house part). This is a tragic story of two lives ending too soon; of a man who has failed in business and failed in political endeavors, who puts the pressures of attaining success and reputation (which are often beyond our control) over what is the greatest source of a rich life: a loving and secure home to be shared with his family.

As a psychologist, I know that if Claud would have had access to proper treatment he could have averted this calamity. I also can't help but think that the greatest tragedy is in the trauma experienced by his two young children, and wonder if they were ever able to overcome this enough to go on to enjoy the riches of life that their parents did not. One positive irony is the fact that the old Enslow home is now used as offices for several mental health professionals, providing the very services to people now that the Enslow family was in desperate need of then.

Does this story have a happy ending? I have tried to answer that question by tracing down the life paths of the Enslow children, Helen Claudia (b. October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1912) and Lawrence C. (b. October 14, 1917). I initially found only limited information when I wrote this article for the local historical society in October 2012, but it appeared that they both went on to live long lives and to find love. Initially they went to live with their maternal grandmother in Oroville, Nellie S. Enslow. But then in 1927, Helen is listed in the Shasta High yearbook, doing well enough to be the secretary of her sophomore student body. I was unable to find any trace of her again, until her death on June 8, 1983, in San Mateo, with the married name of Helene Wheeler.

My next clue on young Lawrence was finding him in the 1930 census living at the Masonic Home for Children in Covina, California. It would seem that his elderly grandmother did not survive the tragedy for long, and he went to an orphanage. The research I have found on the Covina facility (including a biographical book written by a man who grew

up at this orphanage contemporaneously with Lawrence) is that it was a good place to live, for an orphan. I have found that Lawrence went on to marry Lois Ann (unknown maiden name, b. January 1 1923), and to have a son named Robert V. Enslow (whom I tried to contact via Facebook), before passing away on February 29, 2004, in Belvedere Tiburon, Marin County, California.

Then in June of this year, I received a response from my Facebook message, and indeed Bob Enslow is the son of Claude and Ruth, and over the last few months he has been able to fill me in with “the rest of the story.” The following is a summary of information I have received from Bob:

*Dad was at the pool hall with his father, and they walked home hand in hand on the fateful day. Aunt Helene, after she entered the bedroom and saw what happened told her brother to get out of the house and run and tell a friend what just happened. These two personal things were the only ones that weren't in the report you put together.*

*Dad was born in Oroville and his grandparents also lived there. They were a prominent family in town. After his parents' death, he was sent to live with his grandmother. The death of her son and daughter-in-law had a major impact on her. She gradually deteriorated over a period of time and passed away in about a year. After she passed, Claude's brothers were unable to take care our dad, and got together to determine what was best him. They decided to send him to the Masonic Orphanage in West Covina, California where he lived until about age twenty when he moved to San Francisco and met his future wife, Catherine Walker. Catherine's parents were Bessie and Harry Walker. They lived on 11th Ave one block from Irving in San Francisco. Harry worked for Pacific Gas & Electric. Dad and Catherine started dating, eventually got married and moved into a cottage behind Catherine's parents' house on Funston Street. There were two small cottages that are still there today. Dad worked in the shipping and receiving department for John Robling and Sons. They were in the wire business and made the strands of wire that were strung together to form the supports of the Golden Gate Bridge. He then went to work for Dunham , Carrigan and Haden, a supplier to all the hardware stores. He continued to work in shipping and receiving. He became friends with Richard Flynn a salesman and my Dad was into the technical side of all the jobs he had.*

*They started Flynn and Enslow in the early 50's on Mississippi Street in San Francisco. Dad made a wire cloth weaving machine, and they started selling wire cloth to the rock and gravel quarries in the area. My Dad had some experience in Oroville with the gold prospecting and mining as a kid. This allowed him to learn the crushing and separation of the gold from the rock. This fit in with the wire cloth he made that was used by the rock and gravel quarries in Northern Calif. These companies crushed rock that was used for concrete, roadways, cement. His biggest client was Kaiser Sand & Gravel. When Mr. Flynn wanted to retire Dad bought the business. The current location of the business (it is still running, my brother John is running it) is at 1530 17th Street. A coincidence is the office is 3 blocks from where dad had his first job with John Robling & Son. He built the business and expanded into reselling hardware store products. He traveled to Japan and set up a relationship to import fine mesh wire. He also was the first man to import the same material from china.*

*Mom and dad had six kids: four girls and two boys. Cay, the oldest had four children, I had two, Helene had two, Sue had four, Nancy had four, and John had six.*

*Aunt Helene went on to San Mateo and married Chuck Wheeler. They had one daughter. Chuck worked for United Airlines in the maintenance division.*

While this scary tale ended on a good note, I leave you one last thought: as the leaves begin to wither and fall this October, and Halloween draws near, perhaps we should all take care not to tempt the spirits that may be lurking in our own neighborhoods, nor neglect the conflicts that may be lurking inside our own homes and minds.



