

A Sweet Prank Takes A Dark Turn In Rockingham County

In the annals of the Rockingham County Circuit Court Archive, one can stumble upon intriguing stories that rival the plot twists of a mystery novel. This week, our historical treasure trove unveiled a criminal case dating back to April 1, 1916, involving boxes of chocolates laced with poison.

It began innocently enough, with Mrs. Margaret Sipe of Grottoes mailing boxes of chocolate candies as an "April Fools" joke to Lilly Kyger and her sister, Hattie Baugher. Little did they know that the seemingly playful gift harbored a sinister secret.

Fortunately, Lilly and Hattie refrained from indulging in the tempting



Clerk's Corner

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chocolates. However, their younger sister, Cora, was not so fortunate. She took a bite of the tainted treat and was soon wracked with vio-

lent illness.

The sisters, shocked and alarmed by Cora's condition, quickly suspected foul play. Their suspicions turned to

Mrs. Sipe, a woman with a known animosity toward Lilly and Hattie. The reason for her antipathy? Her son's increasing friendship with the two sisters, which she strongly disapproved. Instead, she advised her son, Leemoer Sipe, to marry a young woman in Augusta County, to whom he was engaged. Incapable of suppressing her urge for malevolence, she turned to poisoning the sisters.

Intriguingly, the chocolates were sent for analysis to Richmond, where investigators made a chilling discovery. The confections contained a high concentration of strychnine, a lethal white and odorless powder. Closer examination revealed that the tops of the chocolate

drops had been discreetly broken, allowing the deadly substance to be placed inside before being meticulously resealed.

Upon a thorough investigation, Mrs. Sipe was indicted by the grand jury. She faced charges of felonious intent to injure and kill Lilly Kyger. She was found guilty by Judge Haas and was sentenced to serve 5 years in the penitentiary. The case captivated the community and became a symbol of the lengths to which grudges and hatred could drive a person.

While we may never know what Leemoer thought of the twisted situation, one thing is certain: Mrs. Sipe's actions deterred Lilly and Hattie from their further

"friendly" influence on her son. The incident serves as a somber reminder that even the sweetest gestures can conceal the darkest intentions.

As we delve into the archives of the Rockingham County Circuit Court, we continue to uncover tales that both captivate and astonish, shedding light on the complexities of human behavior throughout history. Visit [Histories Along the Blue Ridge](https://www.rockinghamcountyva.gov/HBR) to learn more about Commonwealth v Margaret Sipe, and similar cases, at www.rockinghamcountyva.gov/HBR.

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