

The History of Sir Harry Oakes



In the summer of 1896, Harry Oakes shook hands with his father and brother, kissed his weeping mother and sisters good-bye, and set out for the great unknown. Young Harry had nothing to offer but a newly-earned Bowdoin College degree and a determined work ethic. He also attended Syracuse Medical school, receiving an education that would help support him during arduous times later in his life. An introverted Harry dreamed of striking it rich in a gold mine and his family supported his weighty endeavor. His mother gave him a large sum of money from her savings, his brother promised to send him \$75 a month from his lumber business in Greenville, and his sister promised to send what she could from her job as a secretary.

Oakes, born December 23, 1874 to Edith and William-Pitt Oakes of Sangerville, was the third of five children. The Oakes family had lived in Sangerville since at least 1808, but in the 1880's William Oakes moved to Foxcroft so his sons could attend Foxcroft Academy - reportedly the best high school in the country at that time. Harry was 23 years old when he set out on a 16-year journey which took him to Australia, Africa, the Yukon, California, Central America, and Canada. During his college years, he predicted to a classmate that he would become a millionaire and die a violent death "with his boots on." He did both. Oakes became a multimillionaire and as he foretold, died a violent death. The account states that Oakes was killed by four blunt blows to his head in the bedroom of his palatial estate at Nassau in the Bahamas. Important clues to the mystery of Oakes' murder may lie inside Oakes' marble mausoleum at a Dover-Foxcroft Cemetery.

Oakes' quest for wealth began in the Yukon where he chipped rock at temperatures which plunged to 60 degrees below zero, even though the gold rush there was coming to a close. In the late 1800's, Oakes spent a year working as a medical assistant treating frostbite cases. By 1906 he found himself shipwrecked off the coast of Alaska, and was taken prisoner briefly by the Russians before being allowed to return to Alaska. Working as a deck hand, Oakes embarked for Australia, where he was once again disappointed in his search for gold. Further failures awaited him in New Zealand and California, the latter in which he suffered and nearly died of heat stroke. In June of 1911, he traveled to Ontario where he received a new miner's license. From Ontario, he ventured North to Swastika - a town in Ontario, Canada. ([Click to View Map](#)) where he met a woman named Roza Brown. Ms. Brown has been described as unusually ugly, malodorous, and was accompanied by snarling dogs. Although she had a well-known contempt for prospectors, Roza ran a boarding house for miners and it was she who put Oakes on the trail to Kirkland Lake and his eventual fortune. Oakes, taking her advice, went to the claims office, leafed through the records and learned of a claim that was going to fall open the next day. However, since he only had \$2.65 in his pocket and couldn't wait for money from home, he hurried back to Swastika where he interested a family of four brothers in staking the claim with him. The five shook hands, agreeing to share in any proceeds from gold that was discovered. The Tough brothers, along with Oakes set out by foot at midnight for the mine. It

was 52 degrees below zero as they walked the seven miles through a beginning snowfall. After driving in their stakes, they toasted what they called the Tough-Oakes Mine. Moments later, the former owner of the mine, William Wright, walked into view. Wright saw what had happened, knew he'd lost his claim, and hurried to stake new ones adjoining the Tough-Oakes claim. Later, he and Oakes formed a partnership and made further claims at Kirkland Lakes. Within eight years, Oakes was the richest man in Canada, where his Lake Shore Mine at Kirkland was second only in wealth to the Homestead Mine in the Black Hills of the Dakotas. After years of struggling to survive, Oakes was now earning an estimated \$60,000 a day.

Oakes celebrated his new-found wealth by enjoying a world cruise during which he met a shy, unassuming woman named Eunice MacIntyre, the daughter of a government official. Eunice was twenty-four, six inches taller than Oakes, and 26 years younger. The couple married and returned to Ontario where the following year, Harry renounced his American citizenship for business reasons. He became a naturalized Canadian, but relocated when he realized that he would have to pay the Canadian government \$17,500 per day in taxes for the entitlement to live there. Oakes and his bride sought refuge at Nassau, a Caribbean Island where he would not be required to pay taxes. There, he built a waterworks, a golf course, set up a bus service for the natives, an airplane service for emergency illnesses, a free milk program for children and a fund for unwed mothers. To this he added a gift of \$400,000 to St. George's Hospital in London. In 1939, King George VI rewarded him by bestowing upon him the title of Baron.

Oakes' good fortune came to an abrupt end on a rainy night in July, 1943 while Oakes' wife and four of their five children were vacationing at their summer home in Bar Harbor. Oakes was to join them there the following day, the ninth of July. His close friend Harold Christie, who was later declared to be the perpetrator, told authorities that when he went to wake Oakes at his Nassau estate, he discovered that his skull had been shattered by four blows behind the ear. The body had been partially destroyed by fire, very likely to disguise the true nature of the crime which still remains a "cold case." Christie, who reportedly slept in the adjoining room that night, claimed that he never heard a sound. What ensued was one of the most disastrous and incompetent police investigations known to date. Important evidence was ignored or discounted, and Oakes' autopsy was so badly mishandled that the plane carrying his body had to be recalled in midair for new photographs to be taken. According to the autopsy, Oakes' death had been caused by a single blow or a series of separate blows from a blunt instrument. This conclusion raised a great deal of suspicion, considering that located on the mastoid bone just behind Oakes' right ear were four holes arranged in a square. Attention was immediately focused on Oakes' son-in-law, Alfred de Marigny. Earlier, Oakes had been seen arguing with him, and de Marigny was deeply mistrusted by the locals. He had arrived in the Bahamas with a playboy reputation and two failed marriages behind him. Moreover, in 1942 he had married Oakes' eldest daughter Nancy, only three days after her eighteenth birthday. He had embarrassed the local society in the Bahamas by becoming successful in several businesses without the cooperation of the local community. He particularly irked those of high social status when he frequently won local yacht races. Oakes' son-in-law was arrested and charged with murder the day after Oakes' death. Standing trial, de Marigny was deemed not guilty by a jury in under two hours, and the case was never again reopened.

Years later, Alfred de Marigny went public and claimed that he found one of the missing watchmen who were at Oakes' estate on the night of the murder. He insisted that the man informed him that at the time of the murder, he and the other watchman were sheltering themselves from a sudden storm in a shed. He further recounted that just after midnight, a sedan pulled up to the house and two men got out and went inside the house. The watchmen thought they heard three or four gunshots, and minutes later flames could be seen in Sir Harry's bedroom. The two strangers then exited the scene in the sedan. The two watchmen fled in terror, but not before they identified a third man in the vehicle as Harold Christie. As told to de Marigny, Christie tracked down the watchmen the next day and paid them each 100 pounds to leave Nassau and never return. They were further encouraged to stay clear of the area when they learned that the local harbor master, an experienced diver, had reportedly drowned in the harbor. The harbor master had reputedly been the only witness to the arrival of a mysterious boat about midnight on the night of the murder. In the account of de Marigny, Christie avoided investigation because any competent inquiry would have revealed that Oakes, Christie, and the Duke of Windsor had conspired to smuggle millions of dollars out of the Bahamas

in violation of currency regulations. The Duke, then the Governor of the Bahamas and former King of Great Britain, possessed the power to reopen the investigation but never did.

Harry Oakes left a personal fortune valued at slightly under \$12 million, not including his shares in the Lake Shore Mine, or the worth of his numerous houses. No satisfactory explanation has ever been offered as to what happened to the rest of his fortune, estimated at least \$200 to \$300 million. There is also still the lingering mystery of who murdered Harry Oakes. The official autopsy declared Oakes was killed by a blow to the head, although de Marigny insists a Nassau doctor told him that Oakes was shot to death, a story that coincides with the watchman's account. If de Marigny was telling the truth, there would exist four small-caliber bullets in Harry Oakes' skull. That detail lies with the remains of Harry Oakes in the millionaire's crypt in the East Dover cemetery located in Dover-Foxcroft.