

A multimedia murder mystery

Former Tosa resident hopes to adapt real-life tale to film

By RORY LINNANE
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Paul Hoffman's interest in the murder of Buddy Schumacher was first piqued when he was still a kid in the '70s. The woman living next door, on the 8100 block of Hillcrest Drive, liked to tell him she knew who did it.

Schumacher was killed in Wauwatosa when he was 8 years old, on a summer day in 1925, after jumping a train with his friends. His murder was never solved.

Hoffman's childhood home had been owned by Schumacher's father. As Hoffman learned more about Schumacher, he couldn't stop looking for more clues.

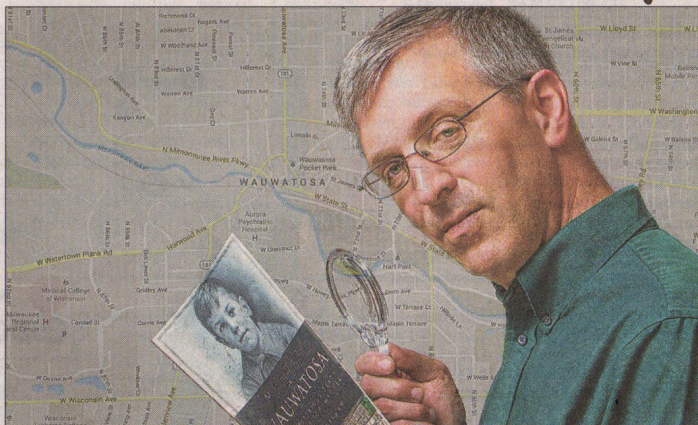
"Every time I found something, it just led to more questions," Hoffman said. "I always had this desire to find out what happened. There's something about me that needs to find answers."

Hoffman's research culminated in a book published in 2012, "Murder in Wauwatosa: The Mysterious Death of Buddy Schumacher." Now he's working on a screenplay, which he hopes will ultimately attract a filmmaker to make the story come alive on screen.

Murder still a mystery

Nearly 90 years after Schumacher's death, Hoffman said the murder is still a mystery. Many clues have been lost over time, and some — like DNA evidence — were never obtained by investigators because the technology had not yet been developed.

Several theories emerged after Schumacher's body was identified. According to Hoffman's book, a man looking for mushrooms found Schumacher in the woods about a mile from his family's home, seven weeks after the boy went mis-



Paul Hoffman/Submitted photo

Paul Hoffman, who previously published a book about the murder of Wauwatosa resident Buddy Schumacher, is now working on a screenplay.

sing.

Later that year, two men who were arrested for other crimes confessed to the killing, Hoffman said, but neither of their stories were found to be credible.

Hoffman suspects another man, Edward Vreeland, who was originally identified by Schumacher's friends as the person who chased them off a train the day Schumacher went missing. Vreeland also reportedly had a handkerchief similar to the one found stuffed down Schumacher's throat. Schumacher's friends later changed their minds about the identification, but Hoffman still thinks the clues point toward him — both in history and in his book.

"If you read between the lines, you can figure it out," Hoffman said.

Filling in the gaps

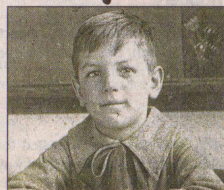
In order to tell a compelling story for a film, Hoffman said he has to extrapolate scenes from the skeleton of facts he's found, imagining what his characters might be doing and saying in their daily lives while searching for Schumacher's body and his killer.

Hoffman said he doesn't plan to depict the actual mur-

der, but he wants to focus largely on the reaction to it. He has imagined scenes like throngs of neighbors knocking down reeds along the Menomonee River looking for Schu-

macher, and Schumacher's parents attending a church picnic during the seven weeks their son was missing.

"It's the relationships between people that's taking the



Submitted photo

Buddy Schumacher lived near what is now 74th and State streets when he disappeared.

most time and thought," Hoffman said.

Hoffman said he thinks the story could attract audiences anywhere, but will always hit closest to home in Wauwatosa, even so many decades later. After publishing his book, he heard from many people with vivid memories (sometimes second-generation) of the search for Schumacher, including one woman who wouldn't share anything other than to say, "It's still too painful."

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