

# REMARKABLE CAREER OF BLUEBEARD HOCH

## NEARLY SIXTY DESERTED WIVES CLAIM HIM AS LOST LIFE-MATE.

## FOURTEEN THOUGHT MURDERED

### Finding of Poison in Stomach of "Next-to-Last" Spouse Points Accusing Finger at Versatile German Whose Record Covers Two Great Countries.

### Holmes, Archfiend of History, Declared to Have Been His Teacher in the Terrible Art—Bigamist Then Known to Authorities as Edward Hatch.

Chicago.—Johann Hoch, whose record as a bigamist is said to surpass anything of the kind in police annals, and a formidable rival of "Bluebeard" Holmes, hanged in Philadelphia some years ago, has arrived here from New York to answer charges of homicide and bigamy. The Chicago authorities have already placed on this man responsibility in numerous cases of bigamy and murder, but hardly a day passes that some deserted wife does not make herself known to the police, and, after having seen Hoch's picture, declare that in the versatile German lies her long-lost husband. The number of these cases has reached nearly 60, and new ones are constantly coming to the fore.

Hoch's alleged doings are, to say the least, remarkable in the extreme. It is declared that he has operated in towns in all parts of the country, and the names which he assumed in his dealings are, as one police official puts it, as numerous as Fourth-of-July "drunks." The list of cities in which it is believed Hoch operated is as follows:

- New York.
  - Chicago.
  - Philadelphia.
  - Baltimore.
  - Brooklyn.
  - St. Louis.
  - Cleveland.
  - Buffalo.
  - Milwaukee.
  - Norfolk, Va.
  - Wheeling, W. Va.
  - Elkhart, Ind.
  - Argos, Ind.
  - Aurora, Ill.
  - Evanston, Ill.
  - St. Paul, Minn.
  - Wartburg, Ger'y.
  - Berlin, Germany.
- Besides these a number of Wisconsin and Iowa towns report traces of his work. Some of the names used by the German are as follows:
- Count Otto von Kern.
  - Healy.
  - Schmitt.
  - Schmidt.
  - Smitt.
  - Hoch.
  - Hoch.
  - Hobe.
  - Hoe.
  - Hoff.
  - Hoff.
  - Haupt.
  - Hauk.
  - Haus.
  - Irick.
  - Prager.
  - Bustenberg.
  - Bustenberg.
  - Adolph.
  - James.
  - Lucas.
  - Doetz.
  - Doess.
  - Bartel.
  - Mayer.
  - Braune.
  - Schulz.
  - Bruescke.

Strange as it may seem, no clear cases of Johann Hoch's work had come to the knowledge of the police anywhere in the United States until the present disclosure, although his marriage business, it is declared, has been carried on ever since 1881. This fact may be due to the desire of many sensitive women who have been duped by this man to keep their desertion from the public.

**Worked from Town to Town.**  
Hoch's policy, it seems, was always to extract as much money as his intended victim could summon without a waste of time, and, after begging leave of absence on some pretext, would disappear as if the earth had completely swallowed him up. Then the tale of a wife in a near-by town, who would pitifully declare that she had given her newly-acquired husband all her money, and that he had not been home for several days and some accident must have befallen him, would bring to light the fact that, in all probability, Mr Hoch was carrying on operations in the neighborhood.

Hoch's method was to advertise in the daily papers, preferably the German publications, saying that his loneliness had forced him to seek a life companion who could tend his wants. Some women answered out of curiosity, others who felt the same absence of some person to share their confidences, would communicate with him. Then the German would select what he considered the best for his purpose and devote his whole energies in that direction. Hoch never, according to reports, sought out those women whose beauty or other charms would make them the target for other men's affections, but women whom, by his superior will, he might find easy to persuade. These women, mostly German, had had little sympathy expressed for their welfare during their lives, and the tender passion which Johann Hoch expressed in his letters seldom failed to execute its aim.

**Samples of His Courtship.**  
All through his missives to his intended victims runs a strain of feeling which would do credit to the most highly accomplished "Beau Brummel" of the old days of chivalry. One representative epistle that came to a Chicago woman, supposedly from Hoch when he was in San Francisco, simply breathed love to the woman who read it. A portion of it follows:

"Dear child, you took my heart by storm. I can't get over it, my dear Johanna. How is it with you, dear child, you like to spend the rest of your life alone? If you only feel toward me as I feel and could bring one-half your love to me as I to you, how lucky I would be. If you could wed your heart to mine for the rest of our days I would be the luckiest man in the world." The intended victim, who had almost succumbed to the tender passion of Hoch, when she read a letter sent to him in

her care from another one of the fair sex, ending with "love and kisses," became suspicious and upon Hoch's arrival in Chicago refused him.

**Fourteen Thought Murdered.**  
Reports state that the following 14 women have been murdered by Hoch in furthering his plans:

- Mrs. Emily Welker Hoch, 6020 Union avenue, died suddenly January 10, 1905. Coroner's physician found large quantity of arsenic in her stomach.
- Mrs. Julia Steinbrecher, 333 Belmont avenue, died suddenly.
- Mrs. Lena Hoch, died in Milwaukee, 1897.
- Mrs. Mary Becker Schultz Hoch, St. Louis, 1903, disappeared.
- Mrs. Maria Schulz, Argos, Ind., died suddenly, 1900.
- Mrs. Hoch, sister of Mrs. J. H. H. Schwartzmann, Milwaukee, died 1898.
- Mrs. Hoch, another sister of Mrs. Schwartzmann, Milwaukee, died 1897.
- Mrs. C. A. Meyer Hoch, died May, 1892.
- Mrs. H. Irick, Chicago, died suddenly, 1892.
- Mrs. Jacob Huss Hoch, Wheeling, W. Va., died suddenly, 1896.
- Mrs. Hoch, Norfolk, Va., died suddenly, 1899.
- Mrs. Henry Bartel, Baltimore, died 1896.
- Mrs. Wilhelmina Hoch, died Buffalo, 1898.
- Mrs. Justina Loeffler, Elkhart, Ind., disappeared.

**May Have Been Hatch.**  
Authorities from Englewood, one of Chicago's suburbs, have become possessed of the most sensational stories relating to the character and past life of Johann Hoch. It is actually believed there that this Hoch was a pupil of "Bluebeard" Holmes, the wholesale murderer, who, in his famous Sixty-third street "castle," crushed out the lives of almost two scores of men, women and children until his discovery, trial and confession finally brought him to the gallows. The Englewood people declare that the methods of the two men are so similar and that the pictures of Johann Hoch so nearly resemble the well-remembered face of Edward Hatch, said to be the right-hand man of Holmes, that they have little doubt but that Hatch and Hoch are one and the same person.

**Awful Methods of Holmes.**  
Holmes' operations were of an awful character and would have done credit to the accomplished Spanish inquisitionist, whose tortures were achieved by means of weapons of force. Holmes, with honeyed words, enticed his victims to his so-called "castle" and with promise of future happiness would thrust them into a dungeon or secret vault and turn on the deadly gases which would soon end their lives. It is believed that many of the unfortunates who disappeared while attending the world's fair in 1893 came to their end through his enigmatical lust for human lives. Holmes admitted doing away with nearly 30 men, women and children, and how many more persons were victims of his cunning will probably never be known. This Holmes has been classed as the archfiend of history, and the very idea that Hoch should have been connected with his awful crimes makes one shudder for the realization of the facts which the near future is likely to bring forth. Holmes derived financial profit from his fiendish acts by doing away with many trusting innocent little children. The bodies were invariably burned in quicklime, and so cunningly were the deeds accomplished that it is little wonder that so many years passed before his crimes were brought to light. The part which Edward Hatch, supposed by the suburban authorities to be Johann Hoch, took, was that of handy man around the Sixty-third street "castle." Such a man was indispensable in covering the tracks of the multi-murderer. Hatch's duty was to build secret walls and passages, lay floors and in many other ways prevent the discovery of the awful carnival of slaughter which had been carried on within the "castle" walls for years. Naturally such a helper was very much in the confidence of his employer. Holmes before his hanging accused this same Edward Hatch with the murder of the Peltzal boy, whose disappearance caused such a furor in the suburb at the time.

**Hoch Appeared in Many Roles.**  
If all reports of the sudden appearances of Mr. Johann Hoch are to be accounted true, then that versatile German gentleman has appeared in almost as many roles as there are leaves on the tree. He has gone about, sometimes as a poor but honest artist, several times as a wealthy stock holder, very often as a gentleman of leisure touring for his health and endeavoring to rid himself

of as much currency as time would permit. Probably the most notable of his poses is that in which he is said to have represented himself as the Count Otto von Kern, of Germany.

This little adventure took him to St. Paul. Here he is said to have introduced himself to Mrs. Hulda Nagel, whom he married after a brief courtship, in May, 1902. Very soon after the simple ceremony the count induced the newly-made "countess" to turn her real estate and other possessions into cash, preparatory to taking a trip abroad, in which, incidentally, the pair were to inspect the estate of the "nobleman" in Germany. He left the "countess" to herself while he went to the city to purchase tickets for their trip. The count was never heard of after that, although a warrant was sworn out for his arrest. Just at present the "countess" conducts a boarding

and furniture on Union avenue. I went with him to the bank and got the money and gave it to him. Then he disappeared." Mrs. Fisher says she believes that she and her sister have been made victims of a deep-laid plot to deprive them of their earnings and savings. She declares that she believes that, seeing that he could not disappear from the presence of Mrs. Welker and marry her without the knowledge of both, he formulated the plot to murder the first wife by some system and, securing what money he could from Mrs. Fisher, disappear for all time. Poison found in the stomach of Mrs. Welker, the police believe, practically corroborates the statement of the latest wife of Hoch.

**Cases in Other Cities.**  
Word has come to the local police from St. Louis, Cincinnati and San Francisco that a man who operated ex-

liked me. She said she did, so I married her, and here I am.

"But I am not afraid. Let them come on, all these other women, 21, 61, 101. Let them all come who have been deserted and robbed by me."

"What about the arsenic, then, that the Chicago police say they have discovered in the stomach of your dead wife?"

Hoch fidgeted.

"Arsenic? Poo! It was her kidneys that killed her. She was sick."

**One Woman Hypnotized.**  
Mrs. Leo Prager, 1810 Cortez street, has been added to the list of "Mrs. Hochs." When she married Hoch, some time ago, it is said that he gave the name of Leo Prager. Mrs. Prager secured \$6,500 through the death of her former husband, and shortly after the marriage to "Prager" she gave him \$3,500, with which he started a second-hand furniture store at 704 Sixty-third street. They fitted out a flat at 4431 State street.

One day "Prager" purchased \$1,200 worth of rugs from the A. S. Klein Carpet company, and when the goods were delivered the Sixty-third street store was found closed. "Prager" disappeared and has not been heard from since.

Amelia Hohn, 5122 Princeton avenue, declared she was married to "John Healy" December 12, 1900, and deserted by him after he had secured \$100 of her money. She believes from the description that Healy was Hoch.

The story came to light through the good memory of Policeman Ward, of the Hyde Park station. He recalled the story the woman had told him, and, struck by the similarity of it to Hoch's methods, after a search of several days found the woman. She said the man, after six days' acquaintance, showed a roll of money and proposed marriage. After the wedding he disappeared. "He hypnotized me. I was compelled to obey him," Miss Hohn said.

**Career Began Early.**

It is very clear that Hoch's career has not been of the meteoric variety as have the developments in the lives of many great criminals. He began his career in this sort of life, it is said, in Germany, his native country, by petty swindling. From this, which he carried on in Bingen, Germany, he went to greater things. He was a wine merchant in Bingen and associated in high society, where he learned his charming manners, that have proven so captivating in this country. A swindle in a German town compelled his departure, and leaving a wife and three children destitute, he "skipped." All over Germany where he has perpetrated his swindles there is great rejoicing because of his apprehension, and the belief is expressed that the magnitude of his crimes will be found to increase as developments proceed. A dispatch from Berlin contributes the following to the known facts:

Berlin.—Johann Hoch, whose many mysterious marriages are vexing the Chicago police, was compelled to leave Germany January, 1895, to escape imprisonment as an embezzler and common swindler. His real name is Jacob Schmidt. He was born in the town of

wife and three children in utter destitution. A receiver was appointed for his business, but his creditors are still waiting for a dividend. The people in Bingen are grimly rejoicing that their former townsman is at last in the toils.

**Hoch Will Feign Insanity.**

From previous experiences Inspector Shippy declares that he believes the alleged bigamist will, as is usually the case when he has been placed on trial, profess insanity. His actions on the train en route to Chicago made it appear that possibly this might be his scheme when brought to account. His rambling talk, and repeated declaration that he was "an educated man and a gentleman" give the authorities the belief that this is to be the defense of Johann Hoch. And judging by what old men on the police force who have seen Hoch say, the man is no more novice than the "insanity gag," and they declare that even the insane officials who have to deal with such cases of shamming almost every day, were fooled at a previous appearance before a law court in Chicago. "I rather expect Hoch will sham insanity," said Inspector Shippy. "When caught and charged with selling mortgaged furniture in 1898, he played the same dodge.

"On trial in Judge Baker's court he cut up queer antics, shook his head at F. J. Magerstadt, who had furnished four flats for him, and declared he never had seen him before, and when Mrs. J. H. Schwartzmann, of Milwaukee, pointed a dramatic finger at him and said: 'That man poisoned my two sisters,' he made faces at her. In the county jail he kept up the farce, raving like a wild man until the guards, who believed in the genuineness of the seizure, feared to come near him. As soon as Hoch realized his pretended insanity would not save him from hard work, he suddenly became as sane as any man."

**Summary of His Life.**

In an interview Johann Hoch vouches for the following summary of his career, ending with his arrival in Chicago, in 1895. It has been reported that his operations began in 1881, or about that time, but according to his own story he did not arrive in this country until two years later. The history is:

- November 21, 1860, born in Horrweiler, Germany. Father, Wilhelm Hoch; mother, Margaret Hoch, nee Schiller.
- 1865-1876—Attended common school and gymnasium.
- 1876-1880—Learned trade of sheet metal worker.
- 1880-1882—Served as soldier.
- 1882-1884—Served as reserve.
- 1884—Left native town, went to Paris.
- 1884-1888—Worked at trade in Paris; lived at Rue de Seine, 43.
- 1888—Went to London.
- 1888-1895—Worked at trade in London; lived at 132 Eugenia street.
- June 15, 1895, sailed from Southampton, England.
- July 1, 1895—Arrived in Chicago.
- July 15, 1895—Bought saloon at 1103 Western avenue.
- When speaking of events during his



JOHANN HOCH, THE MODERN "BLUEBEARD."

house at Austin, Minn., and upon being presented with a picture of Mr. Hoch, declared that the photograph was a life-like reproduction of her lost "count."

**How His Downfall Came About.**

The last of Johann Hoch's alleged dupes, however, proved his downfall, and with the accusation of Mrs. Amelia Fisher, a Chicago woman, came the apprehension of a man whose career, the police say, is without an equal or even rival in the history of any city in this country. Last December Hoch inserted a matrimonial advertisement in a local German publication, stating his longing for companionship and asking that some kind woman become his life companion. Mrs. Marie Welker, a widow who owned a prosperous confectionery business, replied to his appeal by answering the "ad." After a brief courtship she allowed herself to be persuaded that she was the only woman who could relieve his loneliness. Hoch, who had previously rented and furnished a small flat, took his latest wife to the house, which, incidentally, happened to be near the location of the notorious Holmes "castle." She had disposed of her store and turned the money derived from its sale over to her husband, who, representing himself to be wealthy, said he did not care for the cash, but desired to invest it in a safe project, for her benefit. The day following her marriage she became deathly sick. A physician was called, and Mr. Hoch was informed that his wife was suffering from kidney trouble. The arrival of a trained nurse followed, but, although her condition was worse, the nurse was sent away the following day. Then Mrs. Fisher, the sister of the sick woman, came to care for her. One day later, while Mr. Hoch was alone with his wife, she died. Mr. Hoch went downstairs to inform the dead woman's sister, after which Mrs. Fisher went upstairs to clean the death chamber. Very soon after this operation the alleged bigamist proposed to Mrs. Fisher that she become his wife.

"I am an unfortunate man," Mrs. Fisher reports Hoch to have said to her. "Marie was not my first wife. I was married before, and my first wife was an invalid, and now, just as I thought I was to have another happy home, my new wife is dead. I am lonely and have no means. You are a good woman and a good housewife, and I want you to marry me. I will bring your children here from Germany and you can be happy with me."

**Repulsed Then Accepted Hoch.**

Mrs. Fisher has nine children in Germany. Continuing her narrative of the occurrence, she said:

"I resented his proposal, and told him he should not talk of such things so soon after his wife's death. January 15 I rose with him to the cemetery, and again, over his wife's grave, he asked me to marry him. The following Wednesday he came to my home and I consented to become his wife. He told me we would go out of town and no one would know of it until my sister had been dead a long time. I went with him to Joliet that afternoon and we were married. We came back and went to my house that night. The next morning he asked me to give him \$750 I had saved to pay off a mortgage he claimed was held against the house

tensively in all those cities in the same manner as Hoch is thought to be the "Bluebeard." It is believed that more wives will be heard from in each of these cities as the picture of Hoch is more widely circulated.

Hoch's method with such of his wives as he did not find it necessary to otherwise dispose of is illustrated in the case of Mrs. Anna Schmidt Hendrickson Hoch, one of the women he deserted. He married this woman in Hammond, Ind., in 1903, and took her to live at 111 Watt street. Two days later he fled with \$500 she had saved.

"The day after the marriage," Mrs. Hendrickson told Inspector Shippy, who is in charge of the Hoch case, "my husband told me he was heir to an estate in Germany. A few hours later he hurried in from downtown with a fake cablegram which read: 'Father is dead. Your brother, William.'

"He told me \$21,000 was coming to him from his father's estate and I must prepare to leave for Germany with him the next night. He said he had no money for the voyage and asked how much I had. I told him \$500 in the Illinois Trust and Savings bank.

"He asked me to draw it out and give it to him for our trip to Germany. Just to show that he was on the square with me, he said, he made his will in my favor. Then we went to the bank. I drew out the money and gave it to him. At the same time he handed me the will he had made out. Then he hurried away to buy the tickets. That is the last I have ever seen of him."

**Calls Police "Foolishnesses."**

Hoch, when approached regarding his alleged multi-marriages, emphatically denied ever having indulged in such an escapade as bigamy and in his quaint German way indicated that the very thought of such a thing was extremely repulsive to his highly toned character. He strenuously denies marrying as many persons as have appeared claiming Mr. Hoch as their long-lost life companion. In broken English he said that there were 5,000 deserted wives in Chicago, and if the police persisted in connecting him with so many, they must be "big foolishnesses." Mr. Hoch gives the following version of his trouble: "That's all humbug about 1881. How could I be running around marrying women when I wasn't here? I came to this country in the first week of July, 1895.

"When I first got to Chicago I opened a saloon. I paid \$1,000 for it to a man named Louis Witte, but my trade is sheet metal working, and I found out in a few months that the best thing I could do was to go back to it.

"After that I worked for the Pullman company and the Northwestern railroad and the Rock Island. In 1900 I married Mary Hendrickson, and I had trouble with her. I guessed then I wouldn't stay home any more."

"Last December I got lonely, and I got my eye on a widow that I thought would make me a good wife. That was Marie Welker. I was told Mrs. Hendrickson had got a divorce, and so I got tied up again, but no sooner did I get tied than Marie died, and I am just the same as before.

"Then I said to myself: 'I'll marry her sister,' and I asked Emile if she



A FEW OF HOCH'S NUMEROUS ALLEGED WIVES.

Horrweiler, in the province of Bingen on the Rhine, November, 1862. After getting married he kept a small store in his native village and later became a broker and wine merchant in the city of Bingen.

In his capacity as a wine merchant he lived pretentiously and used his acquaintance with high society as the means of extracting large sums of money from business men, whom he impressed as a good fellow. There it was that Hoch learned the winning ways that captivated his American victims. However, the pace grew too fast for Schmidt in Bingen and after a farewell swindle of a sugar refinery he sailed for the United States, leaving a

stay in Chicago, the bigamist becomes greatly confused, denying his statements time and again.

**Will Hoch Be Convicted?**

Whether this character will be convicted of the crimes with which he is charged is merely a matter of conjecture, but whatever turns up it will be recorded in the annals of crime in the United States, and doubtless in the world, that no greater case of wholesale marrying and pitiless swindling has ever come into the public limelight than that which is charged against Johann Hoch, a man whose operations have been felt nationally in two countries and have attracted almost universal attention.