

Lizzie Borden

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For other persons named Lizzie Borden, see [Lizzie Borden \(disambiguation\)](#).



Lizzie Borden

Lizzie Andrew Borden ([July 19, 1860](#) – [June 1, 1927](#)) was a [New England spinster](#) who was the central figure in the [axe](#) murders of her father and stepmother on [August 4, 1892](#) in [Fall River, Massachusetts](#), in the [United States](#). The slayings, trial, and the following [trial by media](#) became a [cause célèbre](#), and the fame of the incident has endured in American [pop culture](#) and [criminology](#). Although Lizzie Borden was acquitted, no one else was ever tried, and she has remained notorious in American [folklore](#). Dispute over the identity of the killer or killers continues to this day.

[\[edit\]](#) The Murders



The murdered body of Andrew Borden, Lizzie Borden's father.





The murdered body of Abby Borden, Lizzie Borden's step-mother.

On [August 4, 1892](#), Lizzie Borden's father, Andrew Jackson Borden, and her step-mother, Abby Borden, were murdered in the family home. The only other people present at the residence at the time were Lizzie and the family [maid](#), [Bridget Sullivan](#). An uncle, John V. Morse, (brother of Andrew Borden's first wife) was visiting at the time, but was away from the house during the time of the murders. Lizzie's older sister Emma was also away from home. That day, Andrew had gone into town to do his usual rounds at the bank and post office. He returned home at about 10:45. About a half-hour later, Lizzie "found" his body. According to Bridget's testimony, she was napping in the second floor of the house shortly after 11:00 am when Lizzie called up the stairs to her, saying someone had killed her father, whose body was found slumped on a couch in the downstairs sitting room. ^[1]

Shortly thereafter, while Lizzie was being attended to by neighbors and the family doctor, Bridget discovered the body of Mrs. Borden upstairs, in the guest bedroom. Mr. & Mrs. Borden had both been killed by blows from a [hatchet](#), which in the case of Mr. Borden, not only crushed his skull but cleanly split his left eyeball. ^[1]

[\[edit\]](#) Motive and method



The Borden's house in [Fall River](#), [Massachusetts](#), where the murders took place.

Study of the facts in the case reveals that over a period of years since the death of the first Mrs. Borden, life at 92 Second Street had grown unpleasant in many ways, and that affection among the older and younger family members had waned considerably if any was present at all. The upstairs floor of the house was divided – the front being the territory of Lizzie and her sister Emma, and the rear that of Mr. and Mrs. Borden. Meals were not always taken together, and conflict had come to a head between the two daughters and their father about his decision to divide up valuable property among relatives before his death – a house had been turned over to relatives of their stepmother, and Uncle John Morse had come to visit that week to facilitate transfer of farm property, which included what had been a summer home for the Borden daughters. Shortly before the murders, a heated argument had taken place which resulted in both

Emma and Lizzie leaving home on extended "vacations"; Lizzie, however, decided to cut her trip short and return early.

She was refused the opportunity to purchase cyanide by a local druggist, which Lizzie claimed was for cleaning a seal skin coat. Shortly before the murders, the entire household – Lizzie included – took violently ill. As Mr. Borden was not a popular man in town, Mrs. Borden feared they were being poisoned but the family doctor diagnosed it as bad food.

[\[edit\]](#) The trial

Lizzie's stories proved to be inconsistent, and her behavior suspect. She was tried for the murders, and defended by former Massachusetts Governor [George Robinson](#).

During the police investigation, a hatchet was found in the basement and was assumed to be the murder weapon. Though it was clean, most of its handle was missing and the prosecution stated that it had been broken off because it was covered with blood. However, police officer Michael Mullaly stated that he found it next to a hatchet handle. Deputy Marshall John Fleet contradicted this testimony. Later a forensics expert said there was no time for the hatchet to be cleaned after the murder.^[1]

No blood-soaked clothing was ever taken as evidence by police. A few days after the murder, Lizzie tore apart and burned a light blue Bedford cord cotton dress in the kitchen stove, claiming she had brushed against fresh baseboard paint which had smeared on it.

Despite incriminating circumstances, Lizzie Borden was acquitted by a jury after an hour's deliberation. The fact that no murder weapon was found and Lizzie was clear of blood just a few minutes after the second murder pointed to reasonable doubt. Some blame her acquittal on the fact that her entire original inquest testimony was barred from the trial. Also excluded was evidence that she attempted to purchase cyanide from a local drugstore days before the murders took place. Others have suggested the all-male jury did not like the idea of acknowledging that a respected man's daughter could possibly have committed such an act. Certainly, another ax murder in the area which took place shortly before the trial was a great stroke of luck for Lizzie.^{[1].)}

[\[edit\]](#) Conjecture

Several theories have been presented over the years suggesting Lizzie may not have committed the murders, and that other suspects may have had possible motives. One theory was that any number of townspeople could have carried out a grudge against Mr. or Mrs. Borden. Another theory is that the maid did it, possibly out of outrage for being asked to clean the windows, a backbreaking job on a hot day, just a day after having suffered from [food poisoning](#). Yet another theory is that Lizzie suffered *petit mal* [epileptic](#) seizures during her monthly period, at which times she entered a dream-like state, and unknowingly committed the murders then.^[1]

Sullivan allegedly gave a deathbed confession to her sister, stating that she had changed her testimony on the stand in order to protect Lizzie.^[1]

[edit] Conjectured affair with actress Nance O'Neil

The book *Lizzie* by [Evan Hunter](#) (real name [Salvatore Lombino](#), and also famous for writing under the name [Ed McBain](#)), posed the theory that Lizzie Borden had an affair with the actress [Nance O'Neil](#), whom she met in [Boston](#) in [1904](#). In the early [20th century](#), it was still considered socially unacceptable for women to become actresses. O'Neil was a spendthrift, always in financial trouble, and Borden came from a wealthy background. The two got along^[citation needed], despite Borden's notoriety.

While there has never been any significant evidence that the two were intimate, the termination of the relationship two years later in [1906](#) was a significant loss to Borden^[citation needed], and she is alleged to have had difficulty in recovering emotionally^[citation needed]. O'Neil was later a character in the musical about Lizzie Borden, entitled *Lizzie Borden: A Musical Tragedy in Two Acts*, where she was played by [Suellen Vance](#). Feminist [Carolyn Gage](#) refers to O'Neil as an overt [lesbian](#)^[1], and although there are few documented details of any affairs, Gage claimed that her sexual orientation was well known in entertainment circles, despite her marriage.

[edit] Public reaction

The trial received a tremendous amount of national publicity, a relatively new phenomenon for the times. It has been compared to the later trials of [Bruno Hauptmann](#) and [O.J. Simpson](#) as a landmark in media coverage of legal proceedings.

The case was memorialized in a popular [jump-rope rhyme](#):

*Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks.
And when she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one.*

The anonymous rhyme was made up by a writer as an alluring little tune to sell newspapers even though in reality her stepmother suffered 18^[2] or 19^[1] blows, her father 11. Though acquitted for the crimes, Lizzie Borden was ostracized by neighbors following the murders.^[1] Lizzie Borden's name was again brought to the public forefront when she was accused of [shoplifting](#) several years following the murders.

[edit] Legacy

The house on Second Street where the murders occurred is now a [bed and breakfast](#). It is open for daily tours. When the house was renovated some years ago by a previous owner, at least one hatchet was found. It was given to the police. Nothing came of it. Ongoing work has restored the home to a close approximation of its [1892](#) condition. The house was featured in

an episode of the [Sci-Fi Channel](#) series *Ghost Hunters*; the team did not uncover any evidence it believed to be indicative of haunting.

"Maplecroft," the mansion Lizzie bought after her acquittal, on then-fashionable French Street in the "highlands" is privately owned, and only occasionally available for touring.

[\[edit\]](#) Genealogy

Borden was distantly related to the American milk processor [Gail Borden \(1801-1874\)](#), [Robert Borden \(1854-1937\)](#), Canada's Prime Minister during [World War I](#), and the American actress [Elizabeth Montgomery \(1933-1995\)](#), who actually portrayed Borden's life story in a [1975](#) movie.

[\[edit\]](#) Non-fiction works on Lizzie Borden

A number of works expounding different theories have been written about the crime. These include:

- Brown, Arnold R. *Lizzie Borden: The Legend, the Truth, the Final Chapter*. Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, [1991](#), [ISBN 1-55853-099-1](#).
- de Mille, Agnes. *Lizzie Borden: A Dance of Death*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968.
- Kent, David *Forty Whacks: New Evidence in the Life and Legend of Lizzie Borden*. Yankee Books, [1992](#), [ISBN 0-89909-351-5](#).
- Kent, David *The Lizzie Borden Sourcebook*. Boston: Branden Publishing Company, 1992, [ISBN 0-8283-1950-2](#).
- King, Florence. *WASP, Where is Thy Sting?* Chapter 15, "One WASP's Family, or the Ties That Bind." Stein & Day, [1977](#), [ISBN 0-552-99377-8](#) (1990 Reprint Edition).
- Lincoln, Victoria. *A Private Disgrace: Lizzie Borden by Daylight*. NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, [1967](#), [ISBN 0-930330-35-8](#).
- Masterton, William L. *Lizzie Didn't Do It!* Boston: Branden Publishing Company, [2000](#), [ISBN 0-8283-2052-7](#).
- Pearson, Edmund Lester. *Studies in Murder* Ohio State University Press, [1999](#).
- Spiering, Frank. *Lizzie: The Story of Lizzie Borden*. Dorset Press, [1991](#), [ISBN 0-88029-685-2](#).
- Sullivan, Robert. *Goodbye Lizzie Borden*. Brattleboro, VT: Stephen Greene Press, [1974](#), [ISBN 0-14-011416-5](#).
- [Evan Hunter](#) (see Artistic depictions/Prose Fiction, below) has a video out called *Reopened: Lizzie Borden with Ed McBain*. In it he has several historians present their theories on who killed the Borden. At the end, he then gives his theory based on his work of fiction, *Lizzie*.

[\[edit\]](#) Artistic depictions

[edit] Ballet

[Morton Gould](#) wrote a ballet on the subject of Lizzie Borden, *Fall River Legend*, which premiered in a production by Ballet Theatre at the [Metropolitan Opera House](#) in [New York City](#) on [April 22, 1948](#) with [Alicia Alonso](#) in the title role. He later abridged the music into a suite which is the more commonly performed version. Choreography by [Agnes de Mille](#).

[Nashville Ballet](#) premiered "Lizzie" October [2006](#) with fresh choreography by [Paul Vasterling](#), set to *Fall River Legend*. His dark interpretation investigates allegations of sexual abuse as the disturbing motive for the murder.

[edit] Comics

- [Rick Geary](#) used the device of a fictional journal written by a Fall River contemporary of Lizzie as the basis of his comic book *The Borden Tragedy: A Memoir of the Infamous Double Murder at Fall River, Massachusetts, 1892*. NY: NBN Pub., [1997](#). It was an entry in his series *A Treasury of Victorian Murder*.
- Princess Maplecroft A regularly published newsletter: the Lizzie Borden Quarterly used to feature a comic strip titled "Princess Maplecroft"
- [Spider Jerusalem](#) from [Warren Ellis's Transmetropolitan](#) claims that "thorough judicious medication I have the brain patterns of Lizzie Borden and the steaming genitals of Genghis Khan".

[edit] Film

She is portrayed as a crazy red head in the movie *Knockaround Guys*

Miss Borden also appears as a character in *Monkeybone* (2001), *Joe Killionaire* (2004), and *Saturday the 14th Strikes Back* (1988), played by [Shawnee Free Jones](#), [Alice Alyse](#), and [Lauren Peterson](#), respectively.

A figure of Borden appears on Captain Spaulding's 'Murder Ride' in [Rob Zombie's](#) film *House of 1000 Corpses*.

The film *National Lampoon's Class Reunion* (1982) takes place at the fictitious Lizzie Borden [High School](#).

[edit] Music

Lizzie was the topic of [The Chad Mitchell Trio's](#) aptly named *Lizzie Borden/You Can't Chop Your Poppa Up in Massachusetts*. It was written by Michael Brown for [New Faces of 1952](#).

She was the subject of the operas *Lizzie Borden* (1965) by [Jack Beeson](#) and *Lizbeth* by [Thomas Albert](#).

She was also the subject of the cockney knees-up style song "Oh, Mother Borden" by late 80s UK musical satirists [The Dubious Brothers](#).

The song *She Took An Axe* by the thrash [metal band Flotsam and Jetsam](#) tells Lizzie's story, portraying her as a demon-inspired woman, treating the subject with humour.

[Alice Cooper](#) on his 1978 album *From the Inside* recorded the song *Inmates (We're all Crazy)*, and recites part of the rhyme.

All Female Band Lizzie Borden And The Axes signed to record labels in the 1980's
Current Popular Band The Liz Borden Band's lead singer's name is Elizabeth Borden
American glam metal band [Lizzy Borden](#) is named after her.

[Melora Creager](#), of [Rasputina](#), wrote her first song at the age of six: 'Ballad of Lizzie Borden'

Lizzy Borden was named in 2006-2007 on the [Spectrum-X](#) song 3:15 A.M --- off of the album Tea Party With Zombies

A song by Boston duo, [The Dresden Dolls](#), called [Thirty Whacks](#) is often suggested to be on the topic of Lizzie Borden.

[\[edit\]](#) **Prose fiction**

The fifth book in [Kelley Armstrong's](#) *Women of the Otherworld* series, *Haunted* features the character Eve Levine, who meets Lizzie in the ghost world, forced to relive the day of her crimes forever.

[Angela Carter](#) wrote a short story, entitled *The Fall River Axe Murders*, on the events leading up to the murders, as well as a short story entitled *Lizzies Tiger*, a strange little story written as a mock children's tale.

In [Avram Davidson's](#) short story *The Deed of the Deft-Footed Dragon*, an exiled Tong enforcer kills the elder Borden and his "concubine".

In the [Mary Higgins Clark](#) novel, *No Place Like Home*, the main character is compared to Lizzie Borden for having killed her mom as a child

Evan Hunter (aka Ed McBain) wrote a fictional account of the murder in his book [Lizzie](#).

[W.O. Mitchell's](#) *The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon* features Miss Borden as a minor character.

In [Agatha Christie's](#): After the Funeral, chapter V - subchapter 4, Mister Entwistle recites Lizzie Borden's poem.

In [And Then There Were None](#), Chapter 11, Detective Blore compares the way Mr. Rogers dies (axe to the head) to an unnamed case fitting the description of the murder.

[Elizabeth Engstrom](#) wrote a novel titled *Lizzie Borden*, published by Tor Books in 1981. Most of the facts of Borden's life are integrated into the fictional tale.

[Walter Satterthwait](#): *Miss Lizzie*, published 1989. *The Return of Miss Lizzie*, published 2005. The novels are set in 1921 and 1924.

Jhon Saul wrote a book, In the Dark Of the Night, which involved Lizzie possessing a man and forcing him to kill 27 and injure 13 people.

[\[edit\]](#) **Television**

An episode of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* entitled "The Older Sister" retold the Borden story, implicating another family member.

[Elizabeth Montgomery](#) depicted the axe-wielding murderess in [William Bast](#)'s two hour television movie for the ABC network, *The Legend of Lizzie Borden* (1975).

Borden was depicted in *The Simpsons* episodes "Treehouse of Horror IV" (1993), and "Cape Feare" (same year).

The [Disney Channel](#) show *Smart Guy* alluded to the Borden murders in an episode in which Yvette and a few friends pretend to be axe murderers and chant the well-known rhyme.

The *Angel* episode, *I've Got You Under My Skin*, claims that Lizzie Borden was possessed by an ethros demon, supposedly explaining the murders. Another *Angel* episode, *Inside Out*, suggested that Borden killed her parents in the nude to prevent blood from getting on her clothes.

In an episode of *The Practice* which was a crossover with *Ally McBeal*, the accused argued that she was a reincarnated spirit of Lizzie Borden.

Lizzie Borden was briefly mentioned on an episode of *Histeria!*, an animated history TV show for children on the American [Warner Bros.](#) network.

In the Cartoon Network series *Time Squad*, Lizzie Borden was among a team of evildoers recruited by [Alfred Nobel](#), along with other evil historical figures so they can achieve the Nobel Prize.

Sci-Fi Channel's "Ghost Hunters" or "TAPS" team investigated the Lizzie Borden house for paranormal activity in episode 12 of season 2.

On 23rd January 2007, the Crime & Investigation Channel aired a documentary about the Lizzie Borden legendary tale.

In *The Venture Brothers* Episode Tag Sale! You're It, Henchman 21 and Henchman 24 have a debate on who would win in a fantasy fist fight, [Anne Frank](#) or Lizzy Borden.

In 2004 the Discovery Channel aired an investigative documentary called "Lizzie Borden took an Axe". In the episode a pair of detectives used modern forensics to exonerate Sullivan and prove Lizzie could have been the killer.

In *CSI: Miami*, Episode Wannabe, a young forensics enthusiast has what he claims is Lizzie Borden's axe in his private museum. He is later killed with the axe.

On the *Food Network* show, *Good Eats* Alton Brown has an ax in his hand and talks about killing a chicken. He says he doesn't want to "go Lizzie Borden" on the chicken because it talked.

In an episode (5.16) of *Frasier*, Nikos, Frasier's cousin, mentions that his fiancé likes to play with her parents' heads whereupon Frasier replies "Yes, well, so did Lizzie Borden.".

[\[edit\]](#) **Theatre**

[Lillian Gish](#) played Effie Holden, a character based on Miss Borden in 1933's [Broadway](#) production *[Nine Pine Street](#)*.

[David Foxton](#)'s *[A Memory of Lizzie](#)* is a short play in a drama anthology called *[Sepia And Song](#)*, 1987, ISBN 0-17-432409-X.

[Blood Relations](#) by [Sharon Pollock](#) premiered at [Theatre Tree](#), [Edmonton](#) Canada in 1980. The play is set in 1902, with its "dream thesis" set in 1892, at [Fall River](#), [Massachusetts](#). It explores the events leading up to the trial.

[Alexander Woollcott](#) of *[New Yorker magazine](#)*, who was fascinated by Lizzie and commented on her during his 1930's radio broadcasts, was the inspiration for the Sheridan Whiteside character in the [George S. Kaufman](#) and [Moss Hart](#) play *[The Man Who Came to Dinner](#)* including his interest in the Borden murders.

[The Testimony of Lizzie Borden](#) by [Eric Stedman](#), a docudrama staged in an accurate reproduction of the Borden sitting room and re-created much of Lizzie's actual inquest testimony premiered at [Theatre on the Towpath](#) in New Hope, Pa. in 1994 and was presented in Fall River in 1995.

[Lizzie Borden's Tempest](#) by [Brendan Byrnes](#) played the [New York International Fringe Festival](#) in 1998. As Lizzie reads the role of [Miranda](#) in *[The Tempest](#)* with her local theatre club, Shakespeare's storm resurrects and reunites the Borden Family. The play's central idea is based on an actual program displayed at the Fall River Historical Society that lists a "Miss Borden" playing the role of Miranda in *[The Tempest](#)*.

The [Massachusetts](#) premiere of *[Lizzie Borden: The Musical](#)* with a book and music by [Christopher McGovern](#) and lyrics by [Amy Powers](#) was held in 2004 at the Stoneham Theatre in Massachusetts.^[1]

[Lizzie Borden: a Rock & Roll Road Show](#), by [Tim Maner](#) and [Steven Cheslik-DeMeyer](#), produced by Tiny Mythic Theater Company, in 1990. In 1994, an expanded version of the show was staged at HERE in New York City.

^[edit] Adoptions of the name

Because of the fame and infamy, several women have later adopted the name "Lizzie" or "Lizzy Borden"; see [Lizzie Borden \(disambiguation\)](#) for a list.

On Halloween Horror Nights 6 at [Universal Resort](#) in [Orlando, Florida](#), Lizzie Borden had her own "scene room" in the haunted house "Universal's New House of Horror". The scene places the visitors in her parents' bedroom, with two chopped up corpses. Lizzie then bursts out of the closet with an axe in her hands.

^[edit] References

- [^] [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#) [e](#) [f](#) [g](#) [h](#) [i](#) "Did Lizzie Borden kill her parents with an ax because she was discovered having a lesbian affair?" from *[The Straight Dope](#)*

2. [^] ["Lizzie Borden Took An Ax" from Crime Library](#)

[\[edit\]](#) External links

[Famous Trials page about Lizzie Borden](#)

[Tattered Fabric: Fall River's Lizzie Borden](#)

[Lizzie Borden Bed & Breakfast in Fall River, Massachusetts](#)

[Unsolved Mysteries: Lizzie Borden](#)

[Lizzie Borden in United States Census Records](#)

["Lizzie Borden Unlocked!" \(online chapbook\)](#)