

3 King of the Osage Hills

fetches away. Her death further destabilized the Burkhart family, emphasizing the cruel reach of the killings that gripped Osage County. The oil fortune, which had been a source of rapid and transformative wealth for the Osage, now seemed cursed. The murders of Anna Brown and Charles Whitehorn had laid bare the dangers that the wealth attracted—dangers that had become personal for Mollie and her family.

In response to these tragedies, Mollie became a pivotal figure in seeking justice. She navigated between the Osage community's growing mistrust and the local authorities' apathy towards the crimes against her people. With both victims being wealthy Osage members, speculation arose about a serial murderer targeting the Osage for their riches, echoing fears of a predator akin to Dr. H. H. Holmes. However, the murder investigations revealed the pervasive racism that devalued Osage lives, with officials quick to dismiss these deaths as inconsequential.

Mollie appealed to William Hale, a powerful local figure known as the "King of the Osage Hills," for assistance. Hale, a man who had risen from destitution to significant wealth and influence, had a complex relationship with the Osage community. He appeared as a benefactor, deeply entwined in the economic and social fabrics of Osage County. Yet, his involvement in the murder investigations, despite his lack of formal authority, highlighted the blurred lines between justice, power, and community trust in the rapidly changing society of Osage County.

As the search for Anna's killer continued, suspicious eyes turned to various potential culprits, including Anna's ex-husband and the murky underworld figures that populated the county, enriched and emboldened by the oil boom and Prohibition. Yet, accusations and theories failed to coalesce into substantial evidence, leading to a cycle of arrest and release that underscored the inefficiency and corruption that plagued the law enforcement efforts.

The official closure of the investigations, with the deaths attributed to unknown assailants, signaled a devastating failure of justice for the Osage community and particularly for Mollie, who, in the wake of her mother Lizzie's death, faced the personal toll of these crimes. The murders of Anna Brown and Charles Whitehorn exposed the dark intersections of wealth, race, and power in early 20th century America, encapsulating the tragedy and turmoil that defined this period for the Osage Nation.