

PART V: ANALYSIS OF THE MURDER

From studying the available evidence and documents from the murder, as well as interviews with people who participated in the case, a picture emerges of how the crime occurred. A copy of the diagram of the murder scene drawn by police officers follows this analysis. The label and yellow highlighting has been added. Item 40 represents where the Brunswick Stew was shelved. The location of the overturned can beside the body can be seen in Part I.

1. The act of murder was violent and brutal with rape or sodomy. Possible semen was found. The assailant was a man.
2. The murder occurred between about 4:45 p.m. when Bessie Parrish stopped at the store and a few minutes before 5:30 p.m. when Gene Harris discovered the body.
3. The steak knife found in Gerald Neighbors' cow lot is likely the murder weapon. It is not a weapon someone would bring for a premeditated crime. The knife was probably picked up in the store and used as a weapon of opportunity. Mrs. Alford likely kept such a knife on hand to use preparing meals and for canning and freezing vegetables.
4. The time and location of the crime made for a high risk of interruption. A motorist traveling south from Alexander City at 55 miles per hour and topping the hill 100 yards north of Alford's Grocery would pass the store in less than 4 seconds. Such a motorist could pull in at the gas pumps and enter the store in less than half a minute.
5. Considering items 3. and 4., the crime was not planned.
6. With the crime taking place in late afternoon during the week, the murderer may have worked at a day job and recently left work. He may have stopped at Alford's Grocery on the way home.

7. The overturned can of Brunswick Stew found beside the victim was stocked near the rear of the store. The murderer may have been purchasing the stew.
8. Interaction between the victim and the killer began near the rear of the store and moved forward.
9. The victim's upper garment was carefully laid on the floor. It was turned inside out and remained buttoned. An easy way to remove a garment in such condition is for the person wearing the garment to bend forward with outstretched arms and have the garment pulled forward from the bottom over the head. There is no indication of violence when the upper garment was removed.
10. The victim's pants and underpants were found between the victim's upper garment and the body and had the appearance of having been hastily removed. There is no sign of violence visible in the picture of the pants and underpants.
11. The victim was found face-down in front of the open front door. She may have been attempting to flee the store when she was caught from behind, taken down and stabbed 17 times in the back.
12. Something happened between the removal of the victim's clothing and the stabbing which caused the assailant to erupt in an uncontrollable rage. The murderer may have psychological issues beyond the scope of this analysis.
13. With the repeated stabbing and the victim's slit aorta, blood splatters may have become a lubricant between the killer's hand and the knife handle. The knife struck a rib and possibly bent the blade at a 30 degree angle. The murderer's right hand may have slipped down the handle and suffered a cut from the blade.
14. A good probability exists that the forensic testing for semen was botched. That the victim was sodomized is uncertain. Other results cannot be excluded, including:
 - a. No semen found,
 - b. Semen found and indications of vaginal sex, and
 - c. Semen found and pointing to the assailant masturbating over the body.
15. The act of murder fully consumed the assailant. There is no reason to believe robbery had anything to do with the crime. More likely, the opened cash till with paper money missing and coins scattered across the floor was a hurried and

desperate act of staging the crime scene to appear robbery motivated the crime. A stranger would have no need to stage the scene.

16. Gene Harris entered Alford's Grocery because he saw the open back door. Deputy Neighbors testified the back door was closed and locked from the inside when he arrived. A crime scene photo (Part I) shows the door as Neighbors described. Only one person had both the incentive and opportunity to lock the door in the few minutes between Harris running from the store and the arrival of several people—the killer, who was at the store when Harris entered.
17. Harris noted that other than Mrs. Alford's car parked under the overhang between the gas pumps and the store, he saw no other cars. Therefore, the killer was traveling on foot.
18. Actions by the killer point to someone who knew the victim and possessed familiarity with the store:
 - a. The killer took care with the victim's clothing.
 - b. The killer took time to lock the back door from the inside. A stranger would not have cared and may not have even known how to lock the door.
 - c. The killer staged the crime scene to give the appearance of robbery by a stranger.
 - d. Since the killer was traveling on foot, he lived nearby.
19. What the killer did when he left the store is uncertain. He took care to lock the back door and left the front door open. He likely took one of two routes and avoided the highway.
 - a. He crossed the highway and entered Gerald Neighbors' cow lot. He carried the knife and dropped or discarded it as he fled, or
 - b. He ran to Linnie Neighbors' house beside the store. He may have stopped in front of the store and threw the knife across the highway. This would seem the less likely route.

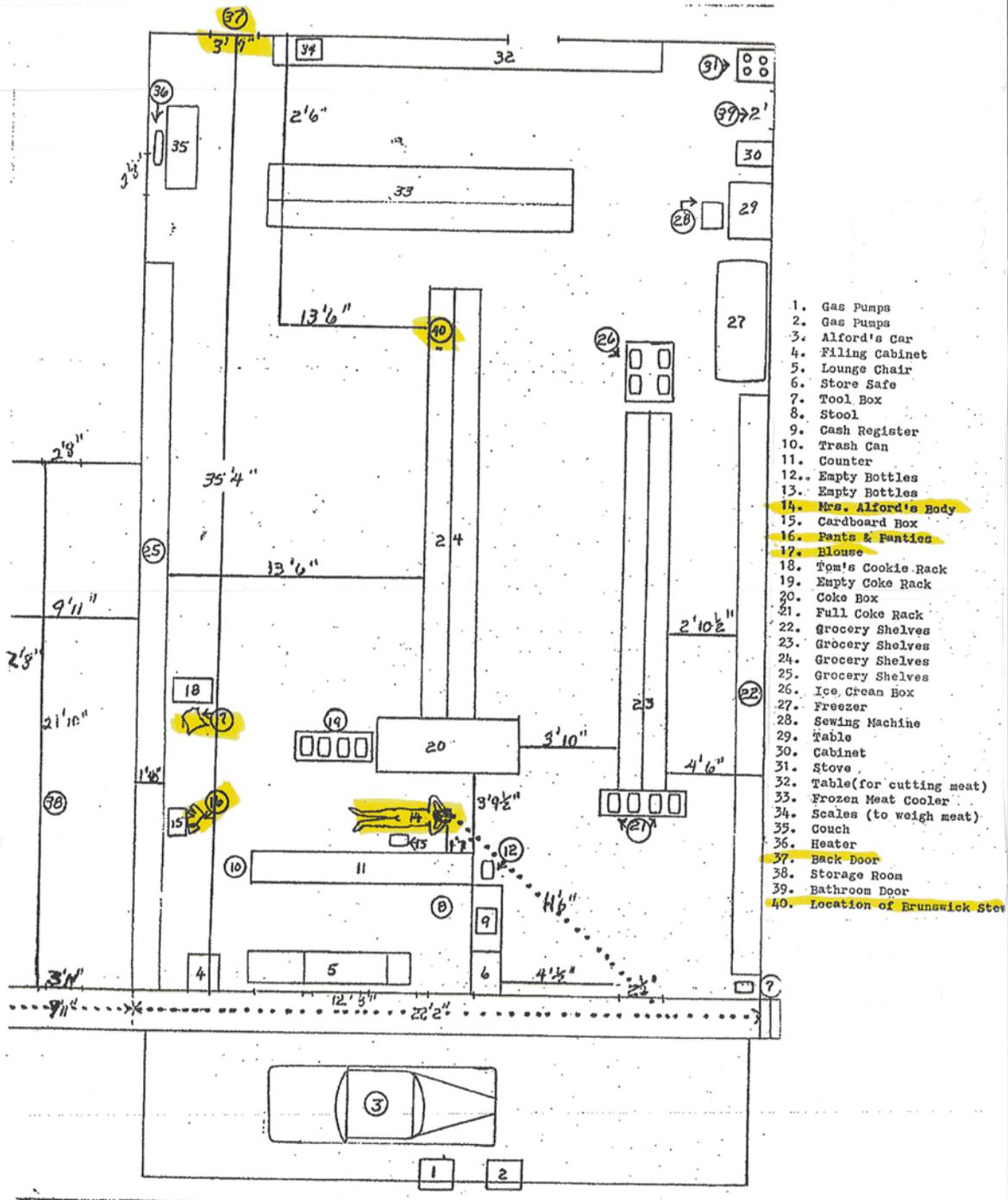


DIAGRAM OF ALFORD'S GROCERY JULY 20, 1978

In Part VI, we will construct a profile and look for a suspect.

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