



## Massachusetts author pens book about death of Chief Greg Adams

# Murder Mystery



This marker in Saxonburg memorializes Gregory Adams, the borough police chief who was shot and killed during a 1980 traffic stop. SEB FOLTZ/BUTLER EAGLE

By Eric Freehling

Eagle Community Editor

**I**t was a real-life murder mystery without a satisfying resolution. It was one of the most frustrating cases in Western Pennsylvania law enforcement history stretching nearly 50 years from its start to its anticlimactic finish.

After Saxonburg Police Chief Gregory Adams was gunned down while making a traffic stop on Dec. 4, 1980, investigators from the Pennsylvania State Police soon had a suspect, Donald Eugene Webb, a career criminal based in New Bedford, Mass.

What they wouldn't have, despite working the case for decades, was an arrest or even a sighting of Webb. It was if he'd vanished like a ghost.

"The Ghost" is what Maureen Boyle titled the book she wrote about the case, which was published earlier this year.

Boyle will be at the South Butler Community Library, 240 W. Main St., Saxonburg, at 1 p.m. July 18 to discuss the case, give readings from "The Ghost," answer questions and sign copies of her book.

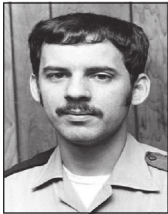
Library Director Michelle Lesniak said those wishing to attend or wanting to pre-order a copy of Boyle's book should call the library at 724-352-4810.

This will make Boyle's third trip to Saxonburg, said the former police reporter who's now the journalism program director at Stonehill College in Easton, Mass.

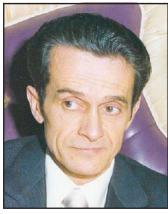
In researching "The Ghost," Boyle said she made two week-long trips to Saxonburg in 2018 and 2019. "None of us went anywhere in 2020," she said.

She said the Greg Adams murder and its ties to New England kindled her reporter's instincts. "I've worked for newspapers for more years than I would care to admit in Bridgeport, Conn., New Bedford and Brockton, south of Boston," said Boyle. "I was a police reporter covering cops and courts."

Her first true-crime book, "Shallow Graves," about the search for the killer of 11 women whose bodies were found along highways outside of New Bedford, had just come out when she learned of the murder of Adams and the long hunt for Webb.



Greg Adams



Donald Eugene Webb

"I knew it here as the Donald Webb case when I came down to New Bedford four years after the murder in Saxonburg," she said.

"I just assumed he had been caught. I was not aware it was an active case," she said. "When the FBI raided Webb's widow's home, I thought, 'This is interesting. This would make a wonderful book.'"

Initially, she thought of using the case as the basis for a fictional work, but she said, "I've always done things that are more journalistic. I will do it as a true-crime book."

It took her two years to research and write the book beginning at the end of 2018.

"The process I have is I write as I go along. I see holes in the story," said Boyle. "It took two years to write. I was adding more things as I went along. I got some FBI files toward the end that had some interesting details about the case," she said.

What stands out in the book is the contrast between Saxonburg, a semi-rural small town with a population of 1,300 in 1980 and the trail of clues that led to New Bedford, a former



Maureen Boyle, director of the journalism program at Stonehill College in Easton, Mass., took two years to research and write her book, "The Ghost." KEVIN KALUNIAN/SUBMITTED PHOTO

whaling center in Massachusetts with a population of 95,072.

The contrast between the two men at the center of the book was even more pronounced.

Boyle writes Adams "was determined to always do right: get good grades, play sports, work hard and commit to family and God." He was the product of large, extended Italian family that settled in South Buffalo Township, Armstrong County. He worked as a policeman in Washington, D.C. before taking the job with the Saxonburg department.

Webb was sent to his grandparents when his father deserted the family at his mother's funeral.

A frequent runaway in his teens, he was dishonorably discharged from the Air Force and landed in Taunton, Mass., where he soon became part of a loose group of criminals known as the

Fall River Gang.

The gang traveled up and down the East Coast breaking into jewelry stores and homes.

Webb racked up convictions for burglary, possession of counterfeit money, possession of a weapon and dangerous instruments, breaking and entering, armed bank robbery, grand larceny and car theft.

"He was a low-level mobster. He liked to give the impression he was tied into the Rhode Island mob. He wasn't," said Boyle.

Boyle said it was believed Webb was in Saxonburg looking for jewelry stores to target.

Boyle said that in 1980 there was a jewelry store on Saxonburg's Main Street. The owner's family lived in the rear of the building.

"When you think of it, can you imagine? It's chilling to me; they were breaking in while the fam-

ily was there," said Boyle.

Whatever Webb's reason for being in Saxonburg, investigators believe Adams was on Water Street when Webb — driving a rented white Mercury Cougar — caught Adams' attention.

When Adams caught up with the car, the driver turned into the parking lot of an Agway store.

"No one knew why he was pulled over, speeding or running a stop sign or Adams thinking, 'This car doesn't belong here,'" said Boyle. "In Saxonburg, he would know who's who."

Adams used his patrol car to block the exit of the parking lot and approached the driver's side door.

Boyle said Webb knew he was wanted for jumping bail for an offense in New York state and didn't want to risk being sent back to prison.

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