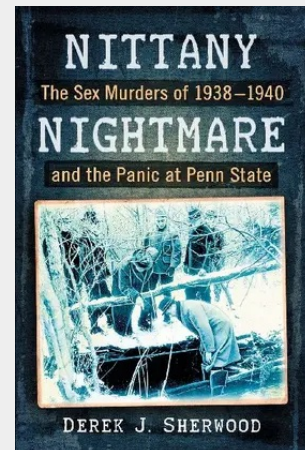


Nittany Nightmare

The Sex Murders of 1938-1940 and the Panic at Penn State

As the Great Depression hit, Penn State College was cash-strapped and dilapidated. Cuts to athletic scholarships left the football program a shambles and the school a last resort for many students. In 1937, underfunded state police fighting a losing battle against striking miners and steel workers in Johnstown called in the National Guard. There were not enough police to cover the state, and it showed. Then someone started killing young women in the area. Between November 1938 and May 1940, Rachel Taylor—the first student murdered in Penn State history—Margaret Martin and Faye Gates were abducted and sexually assaulted, their bodies dumped within 50 miles of the college. Penn State weathered the Depression and soon grew into Pennsylvania State University. The Nittany Lions became a world-class team that would go half a century without a losing season. Two demoralized police agencies were merged, forming the precursor of the Pennsylvania State Police. While Gate's murderer was convicted, the killer(s) of Taylor and Martin were never caught.

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