

Who was Mame Faye?

"Mame Faye" (sometimes spelled Mayme Fay, Maime Fay, etc.) was born Mary Alice Fahey on August 15, 1866, the daughter of Irish immigrants Thomas Fahey and Margaret McNamara Fahey. At that time, Troy was a key location in the American Industrial Revolution, and an attractive location for immigrants seeking work. Tens of thousands of women were employed at textile mills, leading to Troy's nickname "The City of Women."

In 1897, Mary married a man named Bonter (presumed G. A. Bonter, a saloon owner). From the 1910 census on, Mary Bonter was listed either as "single" or "widowed."

In 1906, Mary purchased a rowhouse at 1725 6th Avenue, three buildings north of the police station and across the street from Union Station. An arrest record from 1904 shows a "Mame Fay" already running a house of ill repute on 6th Avenue, but probably as a renter. All censuses from 1910-1940 list up to six female boarders between the ages of 19 and 36 living with Mary Bonter.

The area on 6th Avenue between Broadway and State was the most active of Troy's red light districts, called simply The Line. Mary's neighbors included other madams such as Jew Jenny, Big Flo, Little Flo, Frankie Mason, and at least one brothel catering to an African-American clientele.

Mame's fame spread as trains from Union Station disseminated Army troops far and wide. Nobody can say why she stood out from the rest of Troy's madams. Perhaps her house was the classiest. Perhaps she had the most integrity, longevity or money.

In 1941, Mame's bordello was closed for good, along with the rest of The Line, largely due to the efforts of District Attorney Earl Wiley. Around this time Mary took ill and moved in with her nephew Thomas Myers and his wife Anne at 2111 Burdett Avenue. The rowhouse at 1725 6th Avenue was torn down in 1952.

Mary Alice Fahey Bonter died May 5, 1943, leaving an estate valued at \$282,690.76 (about \$3.5 million today) to her nephew Thomas. She was buried in St. Joseph's Cemetery in the Fahey family plot. Although she set aside \$2,500 to pay for a monument, none was erected until 2006, when her great grand nieces decided to create one.