

What the papers called the Murder Farm

In May 1908, excursion trains brought more than 15,000 people to a farm on McClung Road to watch the sheriff's men dig. Vendors sold postcards at the gate. This map follows the story through the town in the order it happened, and asks one thing: the farm site is private property. View it from the road.

BEFORE YOU GO

Start at the museum; it holds the artifacts and the context. The full loop takes about two hours. Cemeteries close at dusk. Downtown LaPorte is the lunch stop.

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GUNNESS.SCOOPANDDUDE.COM

1 Historical Society Museum

2405 Indiana Ave

The permanent Gunness exhibit: artifacts from the farm, photographs of the digging, and the society's research on whether she escaped. Start here.

2 County Courthouse

813 Lincolnway

Ray Lamphere was tried here in November 1908, convicted of arson and acquitted of murder. The square is where Belle banked and wrote her will the day before the fire.

3 Patton Cemetery

Patton Cemetery, LaPorte

Andrew Helgelien, first out of the hog pen, was buried here by lantern light. Markers for the known and unknown victims were placed in 2008.

4 McClung Road · the farm site

McClung Rd, north of town

Nothing remains of the house. The land is private and in use. Pull fully onto the shoulder, look, and move on. Do not enter.

5 Rossburg Cemetery (optional)

Rosburg, LaPorte County

Lamphere died in prison in 1909 and lay unmarked here until a stone was placed in 2015.

The Gunness Trail

Five places where the story of Belle Gunness, America's first female serial killer, actually happened. 1908 to today.

Vote on whether she escaped, read her letters, and see 85 photographs from 1908 at

gunness.scoopanddude.com

THE STORY IN ONE PAGE

A widow, a farm, an ad.

Brynhild Størseth left Selbu, Norway in 1881 and became Belle in Chicago. Two husbands died, each insured, the second in a LaPorte kitchen in 1902 under a sausage grinder she said fell from a shelf.

From 1905 she placed ads in Norwegian-language papers: a prosperous widow seeking a reliable man with a little cash. Men came from Minnesota, Wisconsin and South Dakota with their savings sewn into their clothes, as she'd told them. None left.

Before dawn on April 28, 1908 the farmhouse burned. In the cellar: three children and a woman with no head. A week later, Asle Helgelien arrived looking for his brother Andrew and talked the sheriff into digging in the hog pen. They found Andrew, then ten or more others.

Ray Lamphere, the hired man, was convicted of arson but not murder; the jury wasn't sure the headless woman was Belle. She was never seen again. Or everywhere, for thirty years.

PERSONAL

WANTED—A woman who owns a beautifully located and valuable farm in first class condition, wants a good and reliable man as partner in the same. Some little cash is required for which will be furnished first-class security. Triflers need not apply.

PLEASE

The farm is someone's home. Stay on the public road. Don't trespass, don't dig, don't knock. Everything worth seeing is at the museum.

