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Skull In The Ashes: Murder, A Gold Rush Manhunt, And The Birth Of Circumstantial Evidence In America.

By Kaufman, Peter.

University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 2013. Softcover. Condition: New. 298 pages. Softcover. New book. CRIME. On a February night in 1897, the general store in Walford, Iowa, burned down. The next morning, townspeople discovered a charred corpse in the ashes. Everyone knew that the store's owner, Frank Novak, had been sleeping in the store as a safeguard against burglars. Now all that remained were a few of his personal items scattered under the body. At first, it seemed to be a tragic accident mitigated just a bit by Novak's foresight in buying generous life insurance policies to provide for his family. But soon an investigation by the ambitious new county attorney, M. J. Tobin, turned up evidence suggesting that the dead man might actually be Edward Murray, a hard-drinking local laborer. Relying upon newly developed forensic techniques, Tobin gradually built a case implicating Novak in Murray's murder. But all he had was circumstantial evidence, and up to that time few murder convictions had been won on that basis in the United States. Others besides Tobin were interested in the case, including several companies that had sold Novak life insurance policies. One agency hired detectives to track down every clue...



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