

**CLARA
BARTON
SMITH
1891-1962**



**SCANDAL
LEADS
TO
MURDER**

On November 21, 1920, a wounded Jake Hamon stumbled into an Ardmore hospital. He wasn't just a rich oilman, he was joining newly-elected President Warren Harding's cabinet. This mystery would draw writers from all over America to uncover the truth.

Jake Hamon began his notorious legal career in Lawton in 1901, but was ousted from office in 1903 for extorting money from local gamblers. In 1910, he bribed U. S. Senator Thomas Gore to support land contracts – worth \$30 million – with the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations, but escaped prosecution.

In 1911, 40-year-old Hamon met 20-year-old Clara Smith. Captivated by her blue eyes and brown hair, they soon became lovers. After sending her to finishing school, she became his personal secretary. When Jake's wife Georgia discovered his affair, she refused to divorce him, but agreed to move their children to Chicago for \$1,000 monthly.

The lovers moved to Ardmore in 1912, into luxurious adjoining rooms at the Randol Hotel, after convincing circus magnate John Ringling to help build a railroad through oil fields nearby, naming the terminal Ringling. He also became rich speculating in Healdton oil fields.

As Oklahoma's Republican National Committeeman, he met presidential candidate Warren Harding. He learned Florence Harding was a second cousin to his wife Georgia. Divorcing Georgia was now out of the question, but he wasn't prepared to cut ties with Clara either. Hamon spent one million dollars at the 1920 Republican convention buying delegates for Harding.

Hamon wanted to be Secretary of the Interior, to capitalize on the oil supply at Teapot Dome, Wyoming. Harding insisted Hamon bring his 'family' to Washington and leave Clara in Ardmore. On November 7th, Jake gave her three weeks to leave. On November 20th, while having dinner with Harding associates, Clara came downstairs drunk, but was escorted back to her room. As Hamon headed upstairs to soothe things over, he was warned, "you will come down on a death wagon", but ignored the advice.

In her room, Jake beat and choked Clara before she pulled a gun from her purse. As he attacked her with a chair – witnessed on the street below – the gun discharged. "Clara, you hit me," Jake said, blood soaking through his vest. Hamon staggered downstairs, insisting on walking to the hospital. The bullet pierced his liver and lodged near his spine. On his advice, Clara fled to Mexico. With Georgia at his side, Jake died five days later.

At her murder trial, it was revealed that Clara married – and quickly divorced – Jake's nephew Frank in 1917, to provide her with a name in order to travel without question with Jake. Did she shoot him to protect herself or for breaking off their affair? Did he shoot himself to avoid a scandal if the truth came out?

After deliberating 39 minutes, the jury found Clara 'not guilty'. She settled with Georgia for \$10,000 and multiple oil leases, then disappeared from view. Clara Smith died in San Diego in December 1962.