

Mateo Banks (1872-1949), family murderer

By Edmundo Murray



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Banks, Mateo (1872-1949), family murderer, was born on 18 November 1872 at Estancia El Trébol (the Shamrock Ranch), Chascomús, Buenos Aires Province, the fourth of eight children of Matthew Banks (1845-1919) and his wife, Mary Anne Keena (1830-1908). Matthew Banks emigrated from Dublin in 1862 and settled in Buenos Aires.

Educated in Buenos Aires and Chascomús, Mateo Banks received the standard instruction provided by Catholic Irish rural families to their boys. He married Martina Gainza in San Luis and joined bourgeois circles in Chascomús and Azul. A member of the Jockey Club of Buenos Aires and British Vice-consul in Azul, Banks was a member of the local landowning elite and a dealer of Studebaker sports cars. He was a frequent participant in Catholic religious gatherings and a prominent member of various charities.

After years of bad management and gambling, by 1921 Mateo Banks had lost his fortune and was in serious debt. That year he sold his last properties to his siblings, and in March 1922 tried to sell cattle belonging to his brother Dionisio. Banks was bankrupt and his plan was to kill his family in order to inherit their properties.

On 18 April 1922, between 1.15pm and midnight, Mateo Banks shot his brothers Dionisio (53) and Miguel (51), his sister María Ana (54), his sister-in-law Julia Banks (*née* Dillon), his nieces Sarita (12) and Cecilia (15), and the ranch workers Juan Gaitán and Claudio Loiza, in cold blood. The bodies of the eight victims were arranged so as to provide evidence against Gaitán and Loiza. However, the accusation rightly pointed at Banks as the only suspect, and he pleaded guilty after three weeks of the court case. On 3 April 1923 Mateo Banks was given a life sentence - the death penalty had been abolished in 1921 - which was confirmed by the appeal judges.

In 1924 Banks was sent to the security prison in Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, from whence he was freed in 1942. Under a new name - Eduardo Morgan - he settled in Buenos Aires and died in a house at 2178 Ramón Falcón Street. The unpublished manuscript of his 1,200-page memoirs has been lost.

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References

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