

# Call of Poolthulhu



A Call of Cthulhu classic-era scenario for 2-5 investigators



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# CREDITS

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# INTRODUCTION

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This scenario was written and designed when my gaming group and I decided to throw a pool party. We figured it'd be fun to play a game of Call of Cthulhu while enjoying the warm weather and my freshly installed above-ground pool.

With that in mind and less than a week to prepare, I begin writing this simple scenario. As you can guess there are several hurdles I'd have to overcome to pull this off. The first being; keeping it simple. Playing on a floating Styrofoam cooler lid doesn't allow much room for dice rolling. So, skill check's and combat have to be kept to a minimum.

Keep in mind that a pool isn't required to play this scenario at all. We're just goofs and thought it'd be fun. By all means, play this scenario on dry land and save yourself the trouble. I just wanted to give a brief explanation as to why I wrote this and the meaning behind it's odd title.

## KEEPER'S NOTE

This scenario was designed with beginner players in mind. It offers a short but sweet introduction to the game with minimum skill checks and combat. Fantastic, for less than optimal gaming sessions. That said, this should be the perfect opportunity to really delve deep into role-playing one's character. As well as a good opportunity to get some additional practice as the Keeper to boot. I highly suggest playing "The Haunting" found within the Call of Cthulhu 7<sup>th</sup> edition QuickStart rules as your first dive into this system.

## SYNOPSIS

The year is 1920 and the location for this scenario is Topsfield, Massachusetts. Tired and hungry, an venerable Chthonian [kuh-THOEN-ee-un] selects it's pray for it's final meal. It is non-other than Prof. Herbert Cowan, formerly of Miskatonic (Miska-tonic) University. Telepathically bound to his home for several weeks as the creatures draw near, the good professor began to go mad under the creatures influence. Fortunately for Cowan the weary Chthonian found itself within a cavern full of fresh water and passed away. Now free from the creatures hold, the mad man escaped his home ranting and raving about his unseen captor.

All the while the enormous creature rots within the cavern, poisoning the well water of several nearby residents who are dumbfounded by the recent onset of illness.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Professor Herbert Cowan is a renown Paranologist, formerly of Miskatonic University. He had spent several decades delving into the unknown and managed to build quite a reputation for himself as a amateur adventurer of sorts. Than several years ago Cowan abruptly decided to retire to his small farmstead in Topsfield, Massachusetts after a particularly rough trip to India. Since then he has had little to no contact with his former colleagues and students. Instead he spends his days reading over his numerous journals of his many trips abroad and drinking heavily at his neighbors retelling said adventures.

Several months ago he begin to have vivid nightmares of some unseen horror seeking him out. Terrified, Cowan became somewhat of a recluse, to the point of never leaving his home. It had gotten so out of hand that Cowan could not leave his chair for fear of coming in contact with whatever sought him out. Little did he know that a creature called a Chthonian had chosen him as a meal. The aging immense squid-like worm had telepathic control over Cowan and sought to keep him in place as it burrowed ever closer to his home. It soon arrived at Cowan's homestead when it mistakenly burrowed into a fresh water cavern. Weary with age the creature succumbed to its fate and perished within the waters found within.

With the creatures death, Cowan suddenly regained control and fled his home ranting and raving like a lunatic about the unseen horror that's kept him captive for the past several months. He was soon captured by the local police and locked up in the State Lunatic Hospital at Denvers. The story appeared in various local and state newspapers followed by a mysterious illness that plagued Topsfield shortly thereafter as the creatures rotting carcass infected the towns drinking water.

## GETTING STARTED

**KEEPER'S NOTE:** *This introduction takes place wherever you see fit, be it a home, cafe, speakeasy, etc, someplace around Boston. The first handout should be given to someone who would be willing to take this information and run with it. For example Prof. Cowan could have been a mentor to one of the investigators or perhaps the investigators have already had several run-ins with the mythos and a story just like this may spark their interest. Whatever it may be the goal is to get the players to Topsfield, while doing some investigating along the way. Printable copies of handouts are located at the rear of this document, while conveniently a print copy is available here for your reference.*

## HANDOUT 1

### Mad Man Apprehended

Yesterday in Topsfield, MA, police arrested resident Prof. Herbert Cowan and incarcerated him at State Lunatic Hospital at Danvers, for being a public nuisance. After having ran about town shouting obscenities at the local residents. Officer Timothy O'Rourke was on hand as a eye witness to the event and had this to say "My god, you should have seen him, covered from head to toe in his own filth. Just shouting at everyone about being held captive by an invisible force. It was goofy, I was afraid he would blow one down so I apprehended him,".

Prof. Herbert Cowan is a former staff member of the renown Miskatonic University located in Arkham, Essex County. He had been living on his family's estate since 1917 after having retired. A former colleague of Prof. Cowan named Prof. Ferdinand C. Ashley had this insight "Herbert was always a bit aloof. He was quite the daring adventurer during his hay-day but in recent years his mind has began to slip. I'm not surprised."

**KEEPER'S NOTE:** *Also keep in mind the investigators are probably going to use any resources at their disposal, for example; locations to gather clues and investigate. Each location of relevance will be listed below, however feel free to add additional content as you'd like. It is also important to remember to describe said locations as it falls to you the Keeper to do so.*

### LOCATION 1: THE BOSTON GLOBE

The Boston Globe is the premiere newspaper of the city of Boston and it's surrounding suburbs. It can be found on Washington Street within the city, should the investigators wish to pay the building a visit several articles relating to Professor Cowan do exist, however they are not open to the public. The investigators will have to chat with James Eagan (a Boston *Globe* editor) to gain access to the newspaper archives, also known as "the morgue". A successful **Charm**, **Intimidate**, **Persuade** or **Fast Talk** skill check is required.

James Eagan is a well dressed, plump, jovial fellow. Who enjoys nothing more than chatting with whomever would listen. He is however, not above taking bribes to aid in paying off his gambling debts. A simple "donation" of more than 5\$ would allow the investigators to bypass any skill checks to get inside the "morgue" and browse around. If they are successful in doing so Eagan calls for Margery Bruade, a frivolous young woman (the records keeper) to escort them to the basement.

The basement of the Globe is dimly lit and humid, with filing cabinets stacked high, full of newspaper clippings and unpublished articles. A successful **Library Use** check will reveal several articles of Cowan's travels. However, ultimately they have little impact on the issues at hand.

- *In 1898 Prof. Cowan traveled to China's Yellow River to study the ancient civilization of the Yangtze (yahng-tse).*
- *In 1905, Cowan discovered a damaged, incomplete copy of John Dee's translation of the infamous Necronomicon within a royal vault found in Jaipur, India.*
- *In 1907 Cowan had been arrested for getting in a scuffle with another staff member at Miskatonic University. This lead to a brief suspension.*
- *In 1911 Cowan travels to Macossa, Africa in search of a ancient lost relic. After several unfriendly run-ins with the locals, he was chased out and returned home empty handed.*
- *In 1916 a accident had taken place in India, cutting Cowan's trip short when two of his students had perished due to a cave-in.*

### LOCATION 2: MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY

The prestigious Miskatonic University can be found in the heart of Arkham, Massachusetts. Just 25 miles northeast of Boston. They are renowned for their Archaeology program and high standard of studies. However, they tend to be a bit on the secretive side when regarding some of their lesser known studies into the occult.

Should any of the Investigators decide to pay the school a visit for more clues about Cowan. They will find that the majority of the student body will have very little to say about the former Professor aside from he being "aloof" and "a daring adventurer in his time". The same goes for the staff at the collage. The majority remarking on his "priceless contributions to the University". Should they speak with Professor Ferdinand Ashley about Cowan he will remark about him being "thick-headed in his research" and "off his rocker once he had found the incomplete Necronomicon".

**KEEPER'S NOTE:** *Feel free to further embellish upon Cowan's adventures during his time with the University. However it is important to make clear that little else can be learned of the professor regarding recent events. When regarding his find in India, unless a investigator is friendly with Dr. Henry Armitage (the librarian) or his assistant Tony Alwyn. They will not be granted access to the incomplete tome.*

### LOCATION 3: DANVERS STATE HOSPITAL

A Gothic-style building, made of brick and granite looms atop of Hathorne Hill in Danvers, MA. Danvers had originally been known as Salem village until 1752. The very same Salem that held the now notorious witch trials by non-other than Judge John Hathorne. The psychiatric hospital had been build on the very same land where the Judge had once lived.

It would be of no surprise if the investigators wish to visit Prof. Herbert Cowan while being treated at the hospital. The asylums clerk Nancy Wilmount is a stern middle-aged woman. She will be hesitant to allow visitors. A successful **APP** or **Credit Rating** check will aid in gaining access to his room. Failing that, than a successful **Charm, Intimidate, Persuade** or **Fast Talk** check will change her mind. She will state after having taken the group to his room that “Only one of you are allowed to go inside. Any more and I fear it will be too much of a strain on the poor soul. The rest of you must wait outside.”.

Cowan will be found sitting in the corner of his room blankly staring out the window, silently muttering to himself. He will briefly look surprised by the investigators presence but quickly returns to looking out the window as if waiting for something. For the remainder of the conversation he will not turn away again. Regardless of any questions asked by the investigator, Cowan will only speak cryptic phrases.

- “The phantom in the deep that seeks.”
- “Bound.. bound... bound. It wont let me go.”
- “I hear it in my waking dreams. The chanting ever closer.”
- “I'm free from it that seeks, but why?”
- “It's so near, yet so far.”

Little else can be gained with speaking with Cowan. You may add additional phrases if you wish. A **Cthulhu Mythos** check can be made to identify what he speaks of. That being a *Chthonian* found on page 283 of the *Keeper's Rulebook*.

Should any of the investigators wish to question Cowans doctor (Dr. Samuel Hopper, a weary looking middle-aged man) he will have very little to say about Cowans current mental state. He will say that he believes that “Prof. Cowan is delusional. What caused this? Anybody's guess. He does have a history of being a bit off according to his colleagues. I will need more time to assess his condition to properly treat him.”

#### LOCATION 4: NEWSBOY

**KEEPER'S NOTE:** *This location is a timed event that is critical to the progress of the story. After a day or so of gathering clues this event should trigger before any investigation in Topsfield begins. However, if they had already left for Topsfield before having hit all of the locations above, not to worry, just have this happen as soon as they arrive at the small town.*

Bart, a young boy no older than 12 years, should approach one of the investigators offering the latest edition of the Boston Globe, featuring the “hot” story on the “plague” affecting the residents of Topsfield. He will charge .02 cents for the paper and happily seek out others to sell his papers to. The player should receive **Handout 2** during this time as that is the only noteworthy article.

#### HANDOUT 1

##### Plague in Topsfield!

Another soul claimed yesterday by the ailment that is spreading throughout Topsfield, MA. A total of four lives have now been lost. The local coroner Dr. Thomas Stein is dumbfounded by the rash of deaths over the past several days.

What is known is that this illness resembles that of food poisoning at first, but quickly develop into a fever that soon leads to death. It is believed that the elderly and children are particularly susceptible to this illness.

#### LOCATION 5: TOPSFIELD, MA

Topsfield is just 25 miles north of Boston. It is a small, quaint farming town. The people are fairly friendly to strangers and most will happily assist the investigators anyway they can with things such a directions. The event with Cowan is still fresh on their minds but the bigger news at the moment is the sudden illness effecting many of the residents. The people here have little more to say then what was already reported in the newspapers. The map can be found on page 9 of this document.

**KEEPER'S NOTE:** *This is a great opportunity to role play as several different townsfolk and have some fun with the characters. You can make up their personalities and chat with the investigators “indirectly” pointing them in the right direction, if need be.*

#### LOCATION 6: STEIN MEDICAL PRACTICE

The Stein Medical Practice building can be found on the corner of Washington Street. Visiting the small practice will yield some useful information should the investigators wish to visit.

Dr. Thomas Stein is a plump, elderly man, who is quick to smile, speaks with a southern accent and loves a good dirty joke. He will happily answer any questions the investigators may have about the illness running rampant in the south east part of town. He doesn't have anything else to offer besides whats listed below. He may point them in the direction of the Sheriff's Office on the corner of Main & Fleet.

- People suddenly become ill nearly a week ago.
- Those on the south-east end of town were the first to be affected.
- The illness is spreading to other parts of town.
- He thought it was food poisoning at first.
- A fever soon follows and in less than a day the person dies.
- Two children, two elderly people and a young man have passed due to the illness over the week.
- He is at his wits end with the illness.
- He contacted the Boston City Hospital for some assistance on the matter. He hasn't heard back from them yet.

## LOCATION 7: SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The Topsfield Sheriff's Office is a small, red, brick building with a single jail cell. The investigators will find Sheriff Richard Waylan sitting in a old wooden chair out front of the building smoking a cigar. Sheriff Waylan is a middle-aged, gruff looking man with a large puffy mustache. He doesn't seem to want to be bothered and will blow the investigators off. A successful **Charm, Intimidate, Persuade** or **Fast Talk** check will loosen his lips. He will bluntly answer any questions about Cowan or the illness.

- A total of 5 people have died so far due to the illness.
- Doc Stein is better suited to answer anymore questions about the illness. He can be found on Washington Street at his practice.
- Cowan was a model citizen up until his brake-down.
- Cowan spent a lot of time with his journalist friend and neighbor Matthew Olson.
- Cowan lives on Liberty Road, on the south-east end of town.
- Cowan was found on Main Street ranting and raving while covered in his own excrement.
- When Cowan's home was searched they had found a bucket full of feces beside a chair in the middle of his den. It appeared he had not left that chair for several days.
- Officer Timothy O'rourke who had originally booked Cowan has fallen ill.
- O'rourke lives on Thompson Boulevard on the south-east end of town.

## LOCATION 8: MATTHEW OLSON'S HOUSE

Matthew Olson's home can be found on Liberty Road. He is the neighbor of Prof. Cowan. He has developed the illness that is spreading through out town and appears very pale and sickly. He will answer the door wrapped in a wool blanket and to his best effort answer any questions the investigators may have about Cowan all the while coughing constantly.

- Herbert Cowan would visit often and drink with him while recounting his old adventures in the east.
- Herbert knew a lot about the occult. He even showed him some of the tomes he found during a trip the two had taken to the University couple of years back.
- Both he and Herbert had been working on a book retelling his adventures.
- He was worried about Herbert when he hadn't seen him for several weeks.
- When he paid him a visit Herbert wouldn't answer the door even though he could clearly see him through the window. He was sitting in chair.
- He was surprised by Herbert's actions.
- He developed this illness soon after Herbert went mad.

- Doctor Stein told him it was food poisoning and to keep drinking water.



## LOCATION 9: HERBERT COWAN'S HOME

The Cowan house is directly beside Matthew Olson's home on Liberty Road where it dead-ends. It is a small cottage, with over grown grass and untrimmed bushes. It appears there have been very little upkeep to this home for sometime now.

The investigators can easily peer into the den though the front window and see a over turned chair sitting in the middle of the room beside a perfectly fine sofa. The area surrounding the chair is filthy with food scraps and jars of unidentified liquids. To the back is the kitchen and to the right the bedroom. The front door has two large planks of wood nailed in to keep the unwanted out. A crowbar could be used to pry the planks of wood off with a successful **STR** check allowing access to the interior of the house. Then move onto **Location 10**.

The back of the property opens up to a large overgrown field with a well sitting at the end of the property. There is a unnatural amount of flies in this area. A rusted steel bucket is sitting face down several feet from the patio. (a curious investigator will be surprised to find a fairly large amount of feces hidden underneath. The investigator and any on-lookers must make a 0/1 **SAN** check due to the pure horror of this rotting, week old pile of human excrement). There is a small empty patio with another door that leads into the kitchen and is not barred. A successful **Locksmith** or **STR** check can open the door. Then move onto **Location 10**.

Should the investigators decide they would like to check out the well, move on to **Location 11** and continue with the story.

## LOCATION 10: COWAN'S HOME INTERIOR

As the door opens (or window) a musty, foul odor creeps out. It is a mix between rotten food and aged urine. The den is simple, with very litter decor aside from a couple of framed photos of the good professor in his youth and a sofa, sitting across from the wood stove. In the middle of the room is a toppled wooden chair surrounded by discarded rotting food-stuffs and mason jars full of a yellow liquid. The rug around the chair is still damp and reeks of urine. Nothing of importance can be found within the den other gross reality of the professors plight.

The kitchen is well kept and barren. Nearly everything in the cupboard and ice-box is gone or rotten. Several bottles of rot-gut are laying in the trash can.

The bedroom appears to be nearly untouched. The bed is neatly made and Cowans journals sit atop a small table beside it, one of which is still open. The investigators can spend some time searching the cottage but they will find very little to explain his behavior or the sudden onset of illness affecting the town.

Should someone decide to read Cowans journals, there are a total of 12 of them. Each 100 pages long, detailing his many adventures in the east.

### The Cowan Journals

*English, by Professor Herbert Cowan, 1896-1916*

A total of 12 rustic travel journals, bound in rough leather detailing the many adventures of Herbert Cowan during his tenure with Miskatonic University. Filled with many legends and lore gathered during his many travels, with a particularly interesting passage relating to his discovery of the incomplete *Dr. John Dee translation of the Necronomicon*. An his thoughts after having read it.

**Sanity Loss:** 1d2

**Occult:** +3 percentiles

**Study:** 4 weeks

## LOCATION 11: THE WELL

As soon as investigators near the well it is apparent where the flies are coming from, along with the foul stench of acidic, rancid meat drifting up from the well. Peering over the investigators witness a swarm of common houseflies buzzing in and out of the well. A **Natural World** check would reveal that it is entirely possible that a larger underground cavern could be below this well and is the source of water for the town. Should someone pull up the bucket they will find the water to be murky with small fleshy bits floating in it. A **Climb** check will allow the them to venture down the rope into the cavern below. Anyone failing the check will fall to the bottom of the well and suffer 1d8 damage.

A map of the cavern can be found on *page 9* of this document.

The well eventually opens up into a larger cavern with separate pathways leading into different directions. The stench is so strong now that it takes everything for the investigators not to vomit. The water down below is murky with bits and pieces of fatty flesh deposits trapped between the stalagmites in several places. A very faint hissing sound can be heard coming from the eastern pathway.

Allow the party to fumble their way through the caverns with the hissing sound getting louder the closer they get to the center chamber. Once they arrive move on to **Location 12**, the conclusion of our story.

## LOCATION 12: THE CREATURE

As they draw near, the stench is almost overwhelming at this point, and the sizzling noise is deafening. Large chunks of rotted flesh float by from beyond the corner as the investigators find their heads are spinning due to the toxic odor.

Rounding the corner, the cavern opens up into a larger space, to their horror houses the enormous, bloated, rotting carcass of some-sort of squid-like creature that had burrowed up from below. It's rubbery, black, slick skin seems to be reacting with the water as it sizzles into a fatty paste-like substance and taken away by the light current. The gaping cavity behind it, leads deeper underground. However it is partially block by what remains of the creatures corpse.

At this point a 1d2/1d10 **SAN** check must be made by each character who witness this horrid monstrosity. Those who do not wish to look at whats inside of the cave still must make a 1/2 **SAN** check for at the very least seeing their reaction.

## CONCLUSION

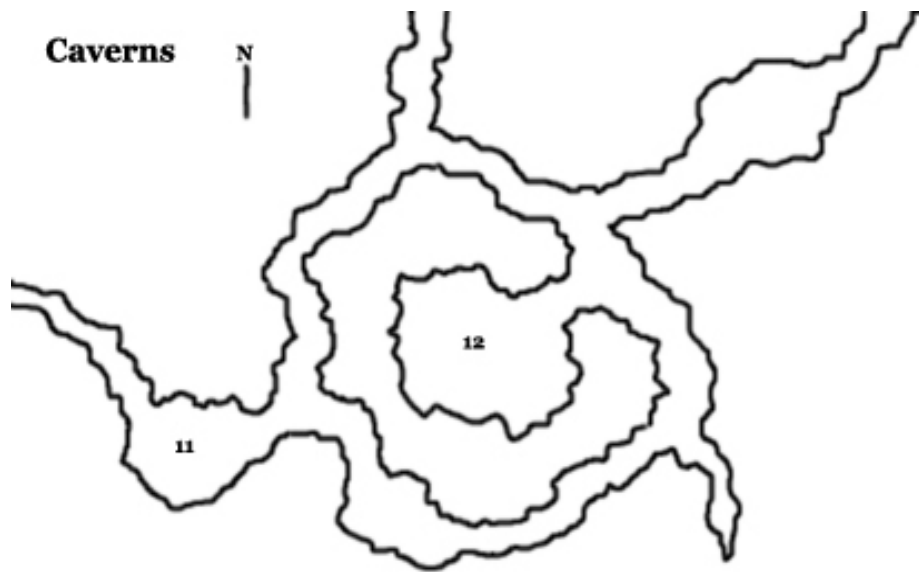
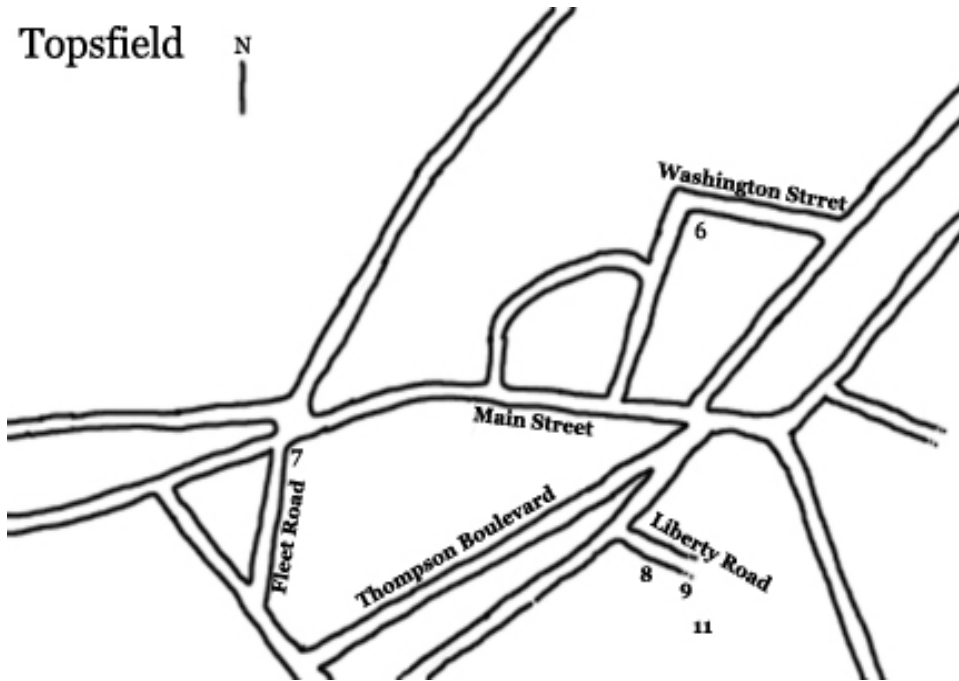
This scenario doesn't end with a show down typically found in published scenarios (not that there is nothing wrong with that). It ends with a whimper. The investigators may attempt to destroy the creatures body (dynamite would do the job) or at the very least cause a cave in to protect the towns water supply. They may also just leave or report it to someone. Who knows, allow them some time to register what they just witness and prepare for your next delve into the madness of the unknown.

**KEEPER'S NOTE:** *Not the ending they were expecting, huh? Sometimes a change of pace keeps things fresh and interesting. You could continue with this scenario by creating your own supplement. For example; maybe the characters wish to check out the pit the creature crawled out from or the opening allows some other great horror access to the surface. Who knows? It's up to you.*

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Thank you for checking out my hastily written scenario for Call of Cthulhu. Be sure to keep your eyes peeled for additional scenarios in the future. Best wishes and sweet dreams!*



MAPS



## THE BOST

### Mad Man Apprehended

Last week in Topsfield, MA, police arrested resident Prof. Herbert Cowan and incarcerated him at State Lunatic Hospital at Danvers, for being a public nuisance. After having ran about town shouting obscenities at the local residents. Officer Timothy O'rourke was on hand as a eye witness to the event and had this to say "My god, you should have seen him, covered from head to toe in his own filth. Just shouting at everyone about being held captive by an invisible force. It was goofy, I was afraid he would blow one down so I apprehended him".

Prof. Herbert Cowan is a former staff member of the renown Miskatonic University located in Arkham, Essex County. He had been living on his family's estate since 1917 after hanving retired. A former colleague of Prof. Cowan named Prof. Ferdinand C. Ashley had this insight "Herbert was always abit aloof. He was quite the daring adventurer during his hay-day but in recent years his mind has began to slip. I'm not surprised".

Prof. Cowan will be held indefinitely within the state hospital.

## ON GLOBE

### Plague in Topsfield!

Another soul claimed yesterday by the ailment that is spreading throughout Topsfield, MA. A total of four lives have now been lost. The local coroner Dr. Thomas Stein is dumbfounded by the rash of deaths over the past several days.

What is known is that this illness resembles that of food poisoning at first, but quickly develop into a fever that soon leads to death. It is believed that the elderly and children are particularly susceptible to this illness.