

WHY DO THEY DO IT?

LAVINIA FISHER



On February 18, 1820, Lavinia Fisher and her husband, John Fisher, were hanged on the gallows in Charleston, South Carolina, for multiple robberies and murders. During the early 1800s, the Fishers operated a hotel called the Six Mile Wayfarer House, which was located 6 miles from Charleston, South Carolina. Men visiting Charleston started going missing—all after staying at the Six Mile Wayfarer House. After numerous reports of these missing men, authorities initiated an investigation. But given the couple's popularity and the lack of evidence, the authorities halted the investigation.

The local townspeople, however, were not satisfied and assembled a group of vigilantes, who attempted to stop the activities occurring at the hotel. Apparently, they were satisfied with their endeavors and returned to Charleston. At around the same time, John Peebles was traveling from Georgia to Charleston. He stopped at the Six Mile Wayfarer House to see if they had an available room. Lavinia greeted Mr. Peebles and informed him they did not have a room but invited him to tea and dinner. Mr. Peebles was attracted to Lavinia's beauty and charm. She asked him numerous questions. After some time, she informed Mr. Peebles that a room was available. During this time, Lavinia kept pouring tea for him; he did not like tea, but rather than appearing rude by refusing the tea, he poured it out when she was not looking.

Soon, Mr. Peebles grew uncomfortable. He noticed that Lavinia's husband, John, was shooting him odd glances while he talked to Lavinia; also, Mr. Peebles was worried that he had provided Lavinia with too much information and thought he might be a target for robbery. So he decided to rest in the chair by the door rather than in the bed. Later in the evening, he was awakened by a loud noise. He realized that the bed he should have been sleeping in had disappeared into a deep hole in the floor. Mr. Peebles jumped out the window and quickly informed the authorities. The police arrested John and Lavinia Fisher along with two men working with them. The police thoroughly searched



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Built in 1802, the Old City Jail in Charleston, South Carolina, housed Lavinia Fisher and her husband, John.

the Six Mile Wayfarer House, uncovering hidden passages throughout the hotel, items that could be linked to various travelers who had been reported missing, tea laced with an herb that puts a person to sleep, a mechanism that opened the floorboards underneath the bed, and almost 100 sets of human remains in the basement.

THINK ABOUT IT

Some have considered Lavinia Fisher to be the first known female serial killer in the United States.

1. Why do you think Lavinia Fisher was involved with robbing and murdering numerous men visiting the Six Mile Wayfarer House?
2. Do you think there is a biological explanation? Do you think there may be a psychological explanation? Or do you think there are other factors that one should consider in explaining her criminal activity?