



# Hard Luck: The Billy Cook Story



**...LED ANYONE**

**BODIES OF FIVE  
ARE FOUND IN OLD  
MINE SHAFT HERE**

Detective Chief Nutt and Coroner Hurst Believe Victims Were Tossed Into 100-Foot-Deep Hole Shortly After They Were Slain — Three, Including Man and Wife, Had Been Bound and Gagged.

A coroner's autopsy last night disclosed that all five members of the massacred Carl Mosser family, whose bodies were found in an abandoned mine here yesterday, were shot to death, three of them apparently after they had been helplessly bound and gagged. The autopsy also indicated, officers said, that the Mosser children, Gary Carl, 3-years-old, and ... through the heart at close range ... of their slaying ...

# Badman Billy Cook



A.K.A.: “Billy Boy” - “Cockeyed Cook”

Classification: Spree killer

Characteristics: Crime spree

Number of victims: 6

Date of murders: January 2/6, 1951

Date of arrest: January 15, 1951

Date of birth: 1929

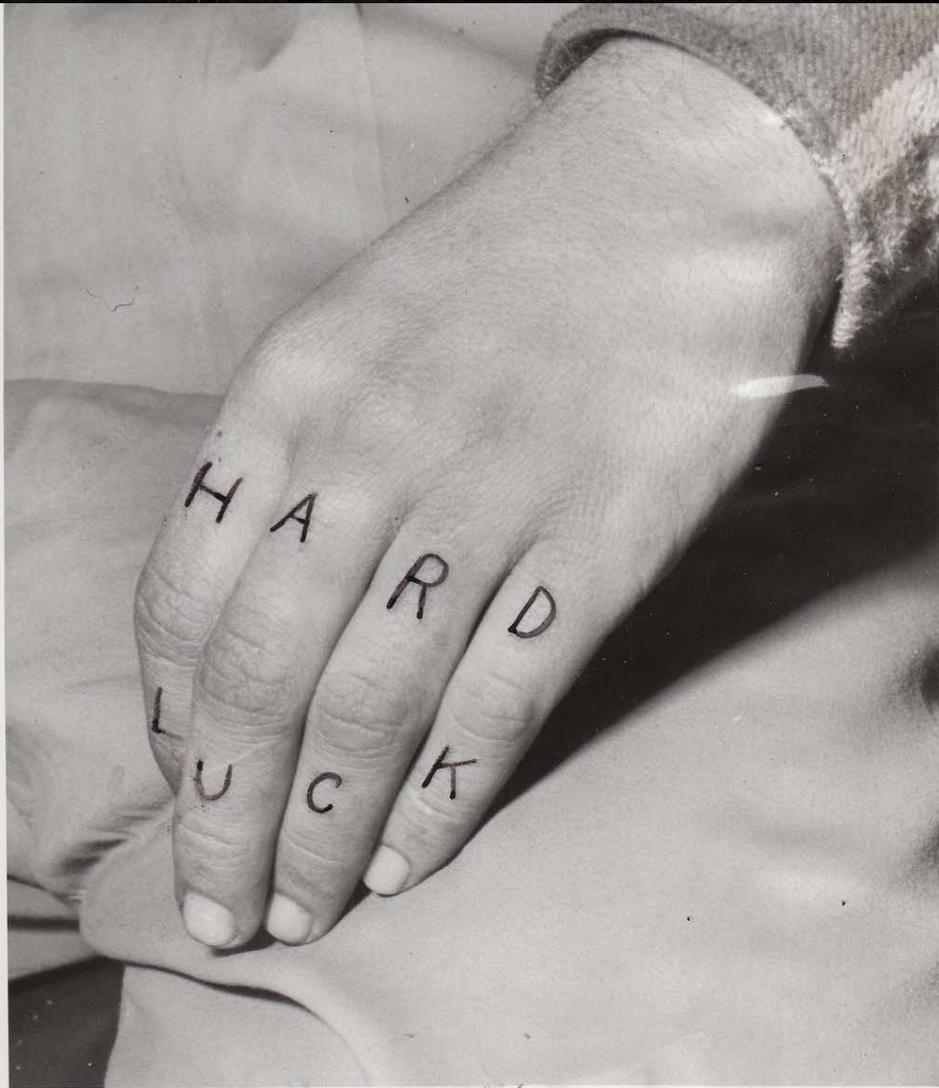
Victims profile: Carl Mosser, 33, his wife, Thelma, and their three children - Ronald Dean, 7, Gary Carl, 5, and Pamela Sue, 3 / Robert Dewey, 32

Method of murder: Shooting

Location: Missouri/California, USA

Status: Executed by

asphyxiation-gas in California at San Quentin Prison on December 12, 1952





(Above) Cock-eyed Cook's father William Cook Sr. in 1955 just before his death. William Cook Sr. worked in Joplin's smelting plants and was known for frequenting Joplin's notorious House of Lords.

William Edward "Billy" Cook was born into a life of violence; a hard-luck life that would carry him all the way to the Death Chamber at California's San Quentin prison before he was 25 years old.

William E. Cook, Jr., the fifth of eight children, was born December 23rd, 1928 in a tumbledown shack near Joplin, MO. His family lived in a small run-down shack on Oliver Street. His mother died when Billy was only five, leaving the boy and his seven siblings in the care of their abusive, alcoholic father. Not long after Mrs. Cook's death, authorities discovered Billy and his siblings living in an abandoned mine cave. Their father was nowhere to be found.

Cook had been born with a growth over his right eye and, although the growth was later removed, his right eyelid always sagged, which earned him merciless teasing and is thought to have stoked his anger and his resentment toward his fellow man. People were repelled by his drooping right eye lid, a sinister-looking affliction that caused adults and playmates to shun him. Some superstitious people said that he possessed "the evil eye."

Social workers found foster homes for all the children except little Billy Cook. The courts finally agreed to pay a woman to take care of Cook. The relationship between Cook and his foster mother was one of constant disappointment for the small child. For two



(Left) Aerial view of Downtown Joplin in 1939. (Above) Grave of Billy Cook's mother Laura M. Cook who died when Billy was 5 years old



(Above) Children's Home in Joplin, MO built at 3rd and Comingo. Young William Cook was know to have lived here after being found in an abandoned mine.

years in a row, the woman gave Cook a bicycle for Christmas, only to have it repossessed, when she could not make the payments. Once placed in a boarding school, the youngster began exhibiting early signs of violent, psychopathic behavior, including throwing tantrums, making demands, and abandoning school at twelve.

A foster family eventually took a gamble on raising the young man, but once in their care Billy began a life of running the streets and committing petty thefts. Following his first arrest, he informed the judge he would rather be placed in a reformatory than return to his foster mother. Instead, an older sister took him into her care. Her kindness was rewarded by Billy robbing a Joplin taxi driver, a crime that landed him back in the reformatory. He was described as “neat, quiet” with a “nice hand[writing]”, but could not control his anger and was

involved in many fights. He became so unruly that he was then sent to the Missouri State Penitentiary, where he was a much-feared inmate, whose conduct was erratic and always violent. On one occasion, a fellow convict made a sarcastic remark about his deformed eyelid and Cook seized a baseball bat and knocked the convict senseless, almost killing



(Above) Missouri State Penitentiary where Billy Cook served four years for robbing a cab driver in Joplin, Missouri of \$11.

him.

When he got out of prison he was 21, a short, heavy-shouldered, brooding youth with a pimply, undershot chin, and the legend H-a-r-d L-u-c-k tattooed on his knuckles. He looked up his father, who lived on a pension in a Joplin shack, and announced that he was “going to live by the gun.” Moving westward, Cook found a job washing dishes in Blythe, California, the only legitimate job he ever had. On the night before Christmas, Cook disappeared, leaving his job without giving notice. Cockeyed Cook headed to El Paso, Texas, where he bought a .32-caliber automatic pistol and started out to fulfill his promise.

Outside Lubbock, Texas, on December 30, 1950, Cook hitched a ride with 56-year-old mechanic Lee Archer, whom he robbed and then abducted, forcing Archer into the trunk of his car. The car broke down outside Oklahoma City, but by this time Archer had pried open the trunk’s lock and escaped. With Cook behind the wheel, Archer had used a crowbar to break the lock on the trunk and opened it as the car sped down the highway. When



Billy Cook's Picture from the Missouri department of Correction. Prisoner #5772.



Carl, Thelma, Ronald, Pamela, and Gary Mosser pose for a picture in 1950.

Cook slowed the vehicle at a turn, Archer jumped from the trunk, rolling to the side of the road. Cook heard the banging trunk lid and stopped. He jumped from the car and pointed his pistol at Archer, who was by then desperately sprinting across the flatland—“It was either run or be killed by that maniac,” Archer later said.

Cook shouted after him: “You better stop, mister! I’m gonna kill you for sure if you keep running!” Archer kept running and Cook, thinking to save ammunition, pocketed the gun, got back into the stolen car and drove off. The car ran out of gas along a lonely stretch of Highway 66, between Tulsa and Claremore, Oklahoma. Cook abandoned the car and continued along the highway on foot.

On Route 66, Cook flagged down a 1949 Chevy sedan driven by Carl Mosser, a 33-year-old farmer from Atwood, Illinois. Mosser was with his wife and three small children in what started out as a vacation trip through the Southwest.



Mosser Family farm in Atwood, Illinois

For the next three days and nights, Cook drove the Chevy aimlessly. He covered 2,500 miles, crisscrossing Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas. When Cook stopped for gas in Wichita Falls, Texas, Mosser saw one last opportunity to free his family.

Inside the store, Mosser grabbed Cook and wrestled with him, but the frightened elderly attendant pointed an old .44-caliber pistol at the two men and ordered them outside. Mosser pleaded with the attendant, shouting: “He’s been in my car all day! He’s got a gun and he says he’ll kill us!”

“Let him loose,” shouted the attendant from the doorway of the store. Cook broke free and pulled his gun, again subduing his prisoners. When the elderly attendant saw this, he locked the door of his store, but thought better of his mistaken actions and went to his battered pickup truck, giving chase to Cook.

Cook saw the old man gaining on him and stopped the Mosser car. He stood in the middle of

THE DIVISION OF HEALTH OF ILLINOIS STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH			
FILED FEB 6 1951	DEPT. NO. 156	RECORD NO. 1000	FILE NO. 1493
1. PLACE OF BIRTH Joplin, Missouri	2. USUAL RESIDENCE Illinois	3. DATE OF BIRTH October 22, 1917	4. SEX Male
5. RACE White	6. MARRIAGE Married	7. OCCUPATION Farmer	8. PLACE OF DEATH Atwood, Illinois
9. NAME OF DECEASED Carl Mosser	10. NAME OF FATHER Hall Mosser	11. NAME OF MOTHER Tollie Glass	12. NAME OF WIFE Thelma Mosser
13. CAUSE OF DEATH Hypertension	14. MEDICAL CERTIFICATION Hypertension caused as stated by party responsible physician & this party. (Normal/Highness Victim)	15. SIGNATURE OF PHYSICIAN E. J. 9018	16. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED Carl Mosser
17. SIGNATURE OF WITNESSES Joplin, Mo. James Ma	18. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED Carl Mosser	19. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED Carl Mosser	20. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED Carl Mosser
21. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED Carl Mosser	22. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED Carl Mosser	23. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED Carl Mosser	24. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED Carl Mosser

Death Certificate of Carl Mosser



Mosser Family at the bottom of a mine shaft

the road and fired several shots at the old man, who gave up the pursuit and turned around. He later reported the incident to police, but by then Cook and the Mosser family had driven out of the state.

Cook ordered Mosser to drive to Carlsbad, New Mexico. From there they went to El Paso and Houston, Texas and Winthrop, Arkansas. The journey ended back in Joplin, Missouri.

The three Mosser children, Ronald, seven, Pamela, three, and Gary, five, had grown restless. Thelma Mosser had lost her composure. Badman Cook told the family that he was going to tie them up and leave them unharmed in the field so that he had

time to get away. He cut strips of cloth from their clothing to bind the parents' hands together and gag them. Cook used bright yellow cord cut from the children's cowboy hats to bind their wrists.

Cook showed no mercy to the family, he didn't stop until everyone in the car was dead, even the family's dog. Carl Mosser had been shot in the head, little Ronnie took three bullets in the chest while Pamela, the youngest had been shot through the heart. Cook had to reload his weapon once during the carnage filling the car with bullet holes and blood. He then drove until 3 AM when he finally arrived at the mineshaft in the Chitwood District of Joplin, MO near 3rd and Maiden Lane. One by one he tossed the bodies down the dark mineshaft and quickly jumped back into the car headed for Tulsa.



Mosser family after being removed from the mine shaft



The FBI made Billy Cook public enemy #1

“I arrived in Tulsa as people were going to work” Cook later told police. “I was excited and didn’t want to be seen with all of that blood in the car. I swung off on a side street and headed west on a dirt road. I slid into a muddy ditch and had to leave the car.”

Cook managed, by bus and hitchhiking, to reach Blythe, Calif., by Jan. 6. Two days later, the blue car was found empty, bullet-pierced and drenched with blood in the hills near Tulsa.

A white-faced state policeman, who had the job of cataloguing its contents, wept when he found the two

Hopalong Cassidy hats. A nationwide alarm went out; police set up roadblocks across half a dozen states.

But William Cook and his .32 vanished. Then, three days later, back at Blythe, Calif. 1,600 miles from Tulsa deputy named Homer Waldrip strolled into an motor court to question a man who had been one of Cook’s friends.

Waldrip knocked. There was silence. Then the door flew open, and a man in a red shirt jumped out, a pistol in his hand. It was Cook. He took Waldrip’s pistol and ammunition belt, walked him out to his patrol car, told him to drive south into the desert. Deputy Waldrip

was taken hostage by the killer. In a manner similar to Mosser, Cook forced the deputy to drive around aimlessly. It was during this drive that Cook bragged about murdering the family from Illinois. After traveling more than 40 miles, Cook ordered the deputy to pull over the car and forced the officer to lie face down in a ditch. Cook then said he was going to shoot a bullet into the back of the deputy's head. But it did not happen. Instead Cook got back into the police car and drove away. Cook later told reporters when asked why he did not kill Deputy Waldrip that the Deputy's wife Cecilia, with whom he worked with for a short

period of time in Blythe was " nice to him, treated him like a human being and had been nicer than anyone had ever been to him in his life. "

A passing car found Waldrip two hours later. Seven miles down the road they found the patrol car with its red light on and its engine running. Less than a mile farther, Cook used the police car's siren to kidnaped another motorist, Robert Dewey, from Seattle. Sometime later the traveling salesman tried to wrestle the gun from Cook but was wounded in the process. The car left the road and careened into the desert. Cook murdered



Spree Killer Billy Cook being arrested

Dewey with a shot to the head before dumping his body in a ditch. They found Robert Dewey lying dead with a bullet hole in his head. Cook killed Dewey, took his car, and crossed into Mexico. Dewey's automobile, a blue 1947 Buick sedan, was found that night beside a dusty Mexican road, 50 miles south of the border.

Then, in dreadful repetition of the pattern, two El Centro, Calif. prospectors were reported missing after starting out on a trip to Mexico. FBI and police scoured towns all along the border, immigration and customs officials searched every vehicle, planes and helicopters swept the desert roads. It was one of the most feverish manhunts since the

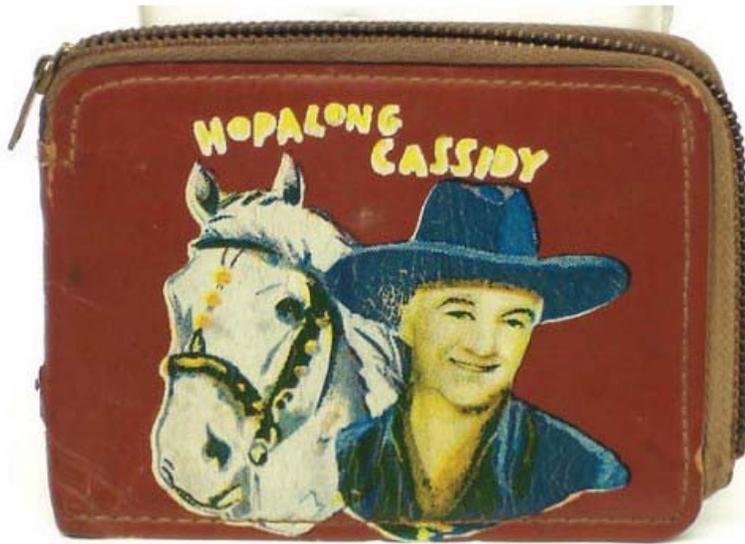
days of John Dillinger. Those two men would be with Cook for the next week, crisscrossing Baja California. The two captives said they were afraid to try an escape because they never could tell when Cook was asleep - his right eye remained open. It ended abruptly when Tijuana's Chief of Police Francisco Kraus Morales led a posse 450 miles into Baja California. There he finally ran the gunman to earth, liberated the two prospectors who had been captured



Mosser Family after being removed from the mineshaft near Cook's childhood home.



Sam Quentin State Penitentiary

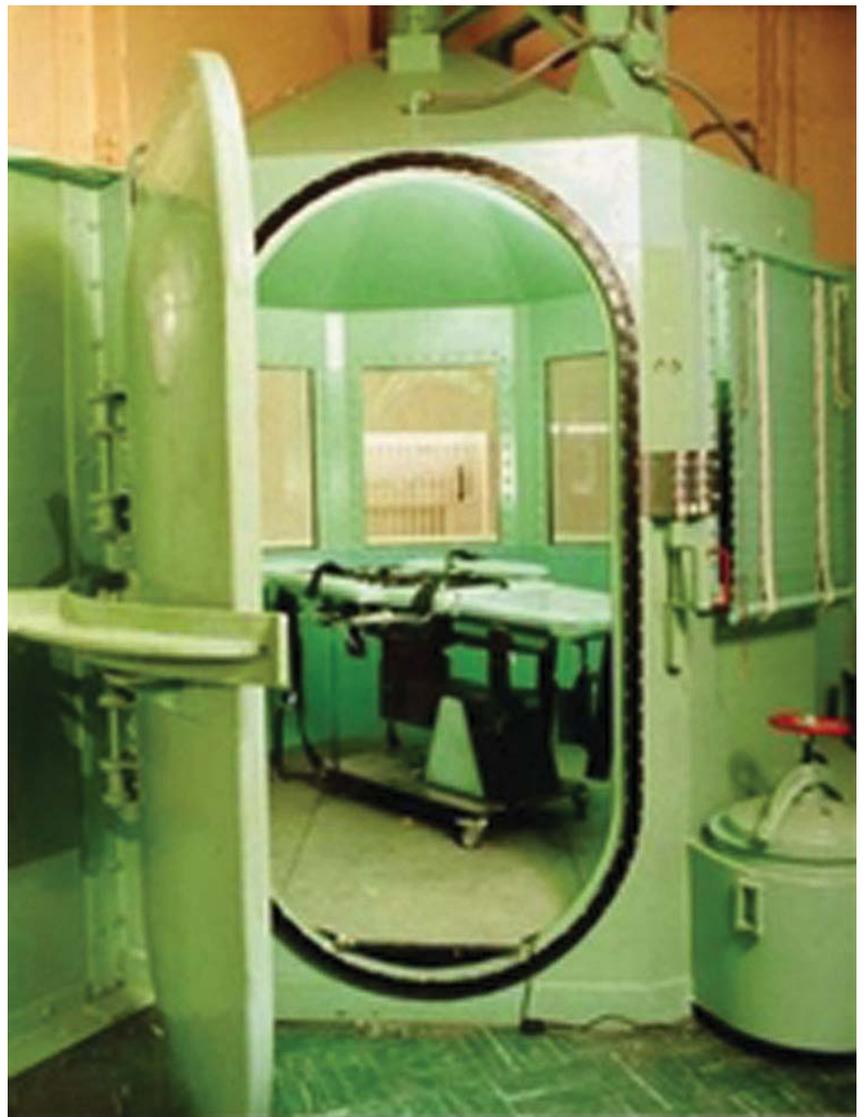


by Cook, and triumphantly flew his quarry back to the border. On the same day a Joplin police officer name Walter Gamble discovered the bodies of the Mosser family thirty feet down a mine shaft near one of Cook's old haunts. Joplin Fireman were lowered down into the flooded mine by cable to retrieve the bodies of the Mosser family. Fireman and spectators including press from across the country were present as the bodies were reassembled on a tarp near the mine. Cook had robbed Carl and Thelma for all of their money but

Little Ronnie had managed to keep \$1.75 safely hidden away from the psychopathic killer in his Hopalong Cassidy wallet.

Once back in the U.S., A covey of psychiatrists clustered in Oklahoma City federal court to do a job of head-candling on Missouri's droop-eyed killer, Billy Cook. But their numbers only seemed to cloud the issue at hand—whether Billy, who killed six people in cold blood on a transcontinental murder spree (TIME, Jan. 22), was sane enough to stand trial for his crimes. Three said he was, four said he was not. Confronted with such guidance, Federal Judge Stephen Chandler decided next day that Cook was sane enough to plead guilty but not sane enough to be given a death sentence. He sentenced the killer to serve five consecutive 60-year terms in Alcatraz—a total of 300 years. But there were those who thought 300 years was much too good for bloodthirsty Billy Cook. The prosecutor bade for a death penalty, left the courtroom snapping: “The goddamdest travesty on justice,

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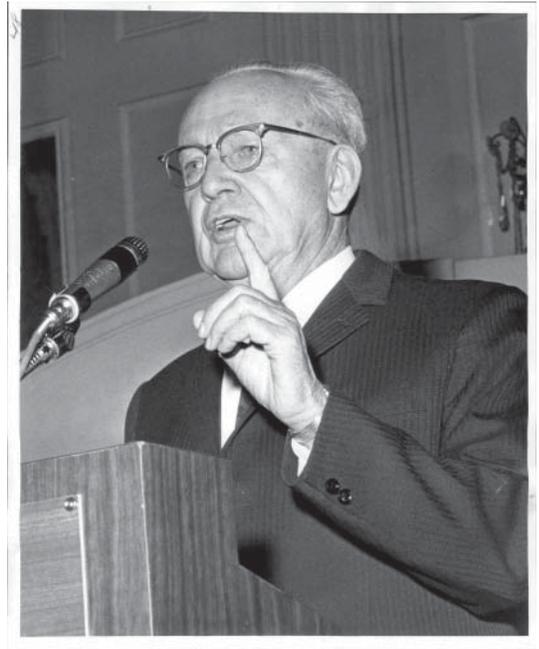
Billy Cook was executed by asphyxiation-gas in California at San Quentin Prison on December 12, 1952

ever.” The Justice Department, apparently dissatisfied with Judge Chandler’s decision too, agreed to surrender the killer to Imperial County, Calif., where officials felt certain they could send him to the gas chamber for the desert killing of a vacationing Seattle salesman.

The U.S. Justice Department, hours after the verdict, announced it would honor a request by California to try Cook in Imperial County. Prosecutors there maintained they had a dead-bang case for the murder of Dewey. They did. In November 1951, a jury took 50 minutes to find Cook guilty. Cook, a smirk on his lips, got the death sentence. “I hate everybody’s guts.” he said, “and everybody hates mine.”

Billy Cook gave them hell all the way to the end, refusing to speak with clergymen or the hordes of eager reporters hoping to get a last minute exclusive with the condemned killer. His last meal was fried chicken, French fries, peas, and pumpkin pie on December 11. The next morning, on Dec. 12, 1952, Cook walked past onlookers and was strapped to the chair in San Quentin’s gas chamber. Cook eagerly inhaled the cyanide fumes and paid the penalty for murder. Harley Teets, the warden of Sam Quentin said “He was the most alone man I have ever encountered.” His estranged father told an interviewer, “You never know where they will end up.”

However, the twisted tale of Billy Cook was not over. Commanche, OK undertaker Glen Boydston was given permission by William Cook, Sr. to claim Billy’s body, which Boydston displayed in his funeral home. It is said that at least 15,000 people, including children, filed past the coffin for one last look at the killer. The Cook family was aghast at the cashing in on Billy’s death, and ordered his body to be returned to Joplin. “Badman Bill Cook is buried at night in Peace Cemetery,” read the headline of a 1952 Joplin Globe story by reporter Gerald Wallace. The graveside service under the cover of darkness was officiated by Rev. Dow Booe of nearby Galena and lasted 10 minutes. “Brief service held at night with aid of flashlights and



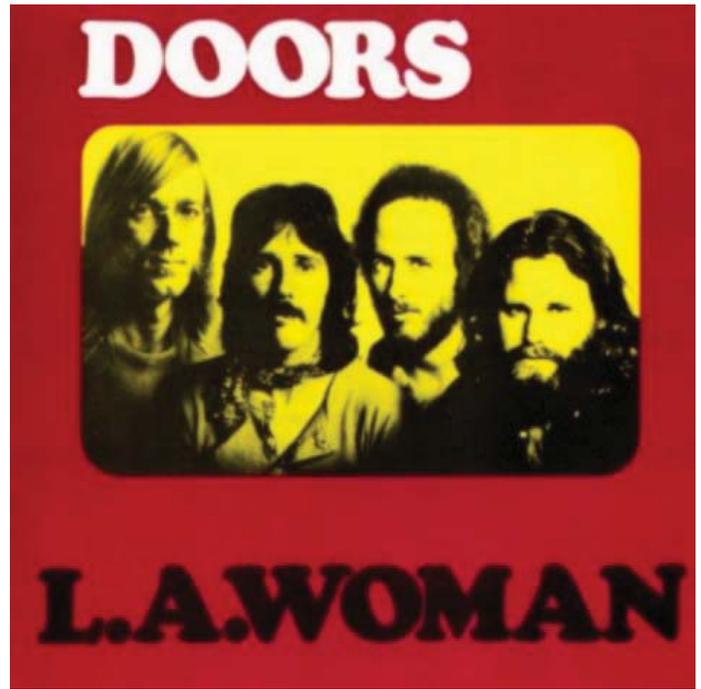
Harley Teets was the warden of Sam Quentin



Area near Cook’s unmarked grave

lanterns before about 15 persons;” “Funeral cortege, consisting of four cars and hearse, moves to burial place over back roads,” the sub-headlines read. “Just as the graveside rites ended,” Wallace wrote, “the cry of a small child could be heard in the chill of the night air.”

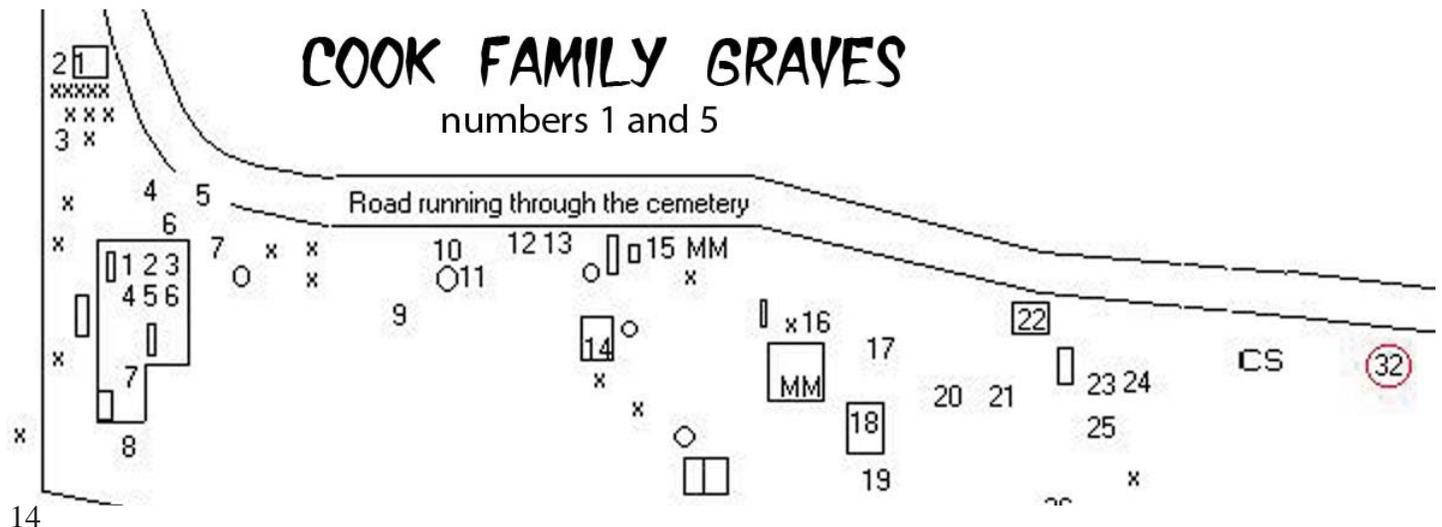
The Billy Cook case inspired the Ida Lupino-directed 1953 film noir classic *The Hitch-Hiker*, which details the final leg of Cook’s saga in Mexico and, twenty years later, would be the basis for the Doors’ Top Twenty hit from 1971, “Riders on the Storm,” included on their L.P.L.A. *Woman*. (“If you give this man a ride / Sweet family will die...”) It was the last song the band would ever record.



Into this house we’re born  
 Into this world we’re thrown  
 Like a dog without a bone  
 An actor out alone  
 Riders on the storm

There’s a killer on the road  
 His brain is squirmin’ like a toad  
 Take a long holiday  
 Let your children play  
 If ya give this man a ride  
 Sweet memory will die  
 Killer on the road, yeah

In December of 1987, three Carl Junction, MO teenagers - Theron Roland, James Hardy, and Ronald Clements - beat fellow teen Steven Newton to death with baseball bats. The three claimed to be ‘Satanists’ and had tired of killing animals, and had been planning Newton’s murder for some time. While bludgeoning Newton, the three allegedly screamed, “Sacrifice to Satan Sacrifice to Satan!” James Hardy later told psychiatrists that he had been possessed by the evil spirit of Billy Cook. At the time of the killing, Hardy was an honor student and his class president. Many people believe that this broken cemetery is one of the most haunted locations in Jasper





Grave of Billy Cook's father found in Peace Church Cemetery

County.

Peace church cemetery has been the home to hundreds of paranormal investigations and people have reported all sorts of spirit activity centered around this old baptist cemetery. Visitors have reported uneasy feelings, shadow creatures, the sensation of being touched, strange lights and full bodied apparitions. Does Cook's lonely, pain-ridden ghost haunt Peace Church Cemetery?

