



# Magazine

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A SEASONAL HISTORY PUBLICATION *of the* PORTER COUNTY MUSEUM

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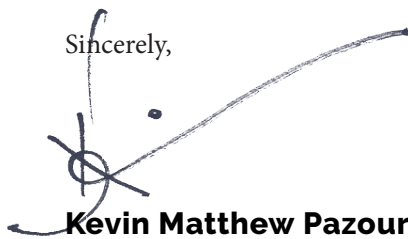
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## Dear Readers,

This last year has certainly brought great change to many things, including our beloved museum. We've thought quite a bit on how to safely and effectively connect with our most ardent supporters during this pandemic. As a result, we are pleased to introduce you to the inaugural issue of *PoCo Muse Magazine*. The stories and images of this seasonal publication are yet another way to engage the history of Porter County. We are certainly navigating a challenging time, but we feel the events of the present have helped strengthen the PoCo Muse. Thank you for your continued support of the work we do to educate, enrich, and inspire.

Sincerely,



**Kevin Matthew Pazour**

*Executive Director, PoCo Muse*



**Joanne Urschel**

*Chair, Board of Trustees, PoCo Muse Foundation*

**Cover** A cell door in the old Porter County Jail. Photograph by Albert Photographic.

**Below** A view of the west tower of the old Porter County Jail from December 2020. Photograph by Albert Photographic.



**W**hile the old Porter County Jail at the corner of Franklin and Indiana has not held a prisoner for nearly fifty years, a few clues linger throughout the building that shed light on the lives of those who were once imprisoned there. No clue is more prominent than the eleven by five-and-a-half-foot mural on the north wall of the turnkey's office.

The painting, now chipped and cracked, depicts a creek lined with sycamore trees bearing the yellow and brown leaves of fall. This window into an idyllic world seems out of place in a structure of cold concrete and iron, where so many men and women spent days, weeks, and even years imprisoned.

Robert Everett Stroupe made his first official visit to the Porter County Jail in September 1966. At the time, he was eight years into a ten-year sentence for forgery, which he was serving at the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City. Stroupe and another prisoner were on a work detail at the Norman Beatty Memorial Hospital in Westville, now the Westville Correctional Center, when they attempted to escape. Without much of a plan, the pair simply walked away from their work detail. Early the following morning, Portage police officer Larry Longmore found Stroupe walking along Dombey Road and took him to the jail for questioning.

The forty-three-year-old Stroupe offered no resistance. He told Longmore that he had been wandering in the nearby swamps, and was “too tired to run anymore.” Stroupe and the other escapee had parted ways shortly after leaving the work detail. The authorities returned Stroupe to the state prison, where he served the remainder of his sentence.

By 1968, Stroupe had finished his term. In April of that year, *The Vidette-Messenger* reported that Stroupe's vehicle was rear ended by Charles Scott of Gary near the intersection of IN 249 and US 20. Stroupe required treatment for minor head injuries.

*This window into an idyllic world seems out of place in a structure of cold concrete and iron, where so many men and women spent days, weeks, and even years imprisoned.*

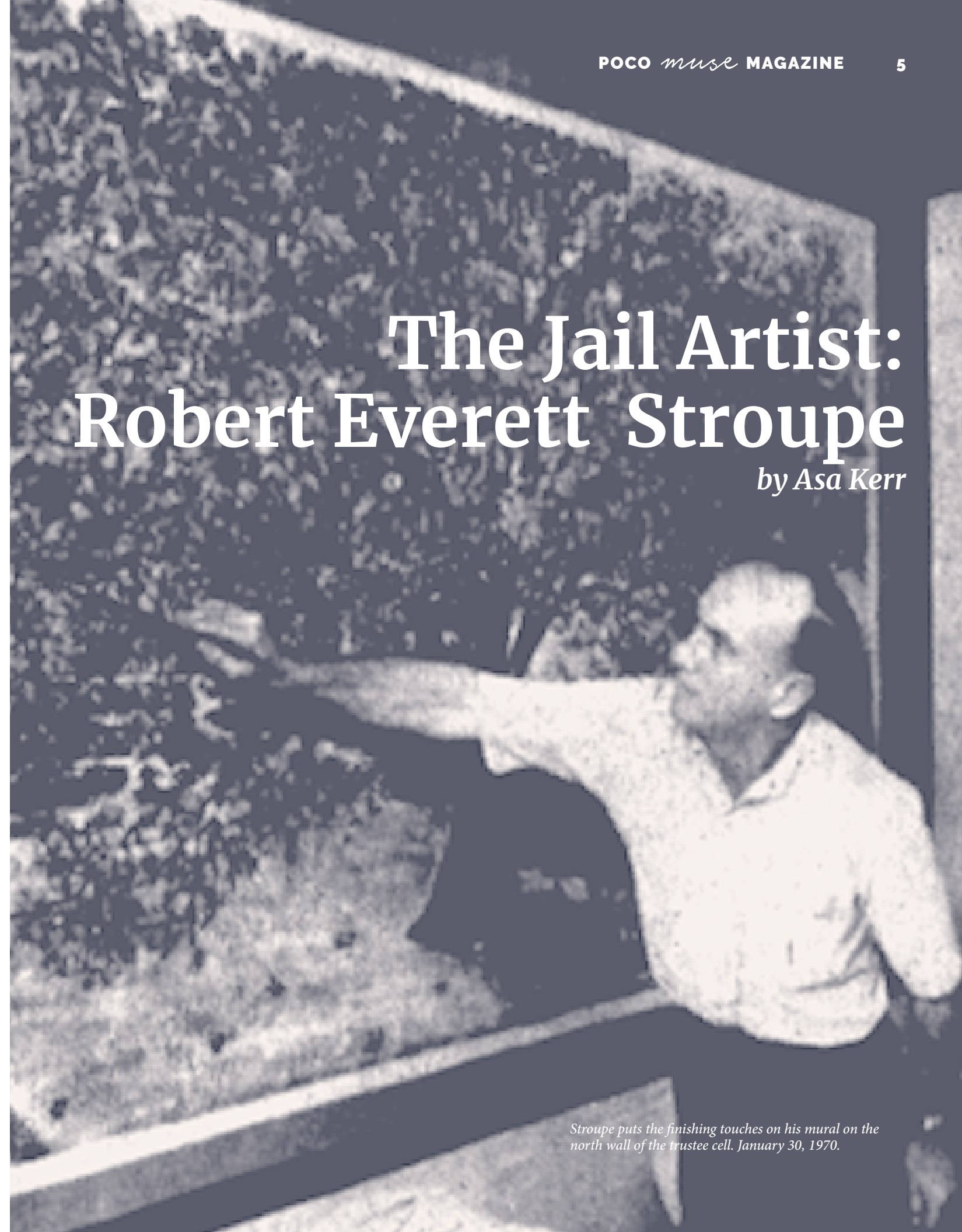
Stroupe lost his mother, Florence Wright, to cancer in late March 1969. Then almost one year after his car accident, and two weeks after his mother's death, Stroupe had another stroke of bad luck while working as a gas station attendant at the Clark station in Burns Harbor. A customer driving a green and white Willys Jeep pulled into the station, and Stroupe, as usual, approached the vehicle to offer the customer gas. The driver then sprang out of the Jeep, brandishing a .38 revolver at Stroupe, who quickly backed into the service station. The assailant followed him into the station and took about \$90 from the till — he was apprehended shortly thereafter and booked into the Porter County Jail. Stroupe had not had a good year following his release from jail.

Stroupe was already familiar with forgery, and, though the details of his earlier arrest are unclear, he had practiced it extensively enough to be sentenced to ten years in state prison. In June 1969, Stroupe began forging checks from his employer Robert Cook, owner of Bob's Super 100 Service Station in Chesterton. He forged six checks in total, each in the amount of \$143.50, equal to about \$1,000 in 2021. He tried to pass off the first of these checks at Smedman's Foodliner in Chesterton, and, though he was initially successful, store manager Gerald Bross eventually discovered the fraud and reported it to the Porter County Prosecutor's Office.

By the time Bross reported the check, Stroupe had likely already left town, embarking on a

# The Jail Artist: Robert Everett Stroupe

by Asa Kerr



*Stroupe puts the finishing touches on his mural on the north wall of the trustee cell. January 30, 1970.*

cross-country journey that ended in Los Angeles, where local authorities detained him — Stroupe probably turned himself in to police. Porter County Prosecutor William G. Conover and Sheriff Myrick Crampton flew from Chicago to Los Angeles to pick up Stroupe and return him to Porter County in late August. In mid-October, the court appointed local attorney Quentin Blachly to serve as Stroupe's pauper counsel.

From then, it took an entire year for Stroupe's case to be heard in court. Stroupe ingratiated himself with the sheriff and deputies in his year-long stay at the Porter County Jail. He served as jail trustee, which, in county jails, is usually a position held by those inmates who have not committed violent or serious crimes, are not awaiting transfer to a state penitentiary, and have earned the trust of jail authorities. The sheriff delegates tasks to the trustee, such as cleaning and laundry.

Aside from trustee duties, Sheriff Crampton also allowed Stroupe to paint. At first, he painted small landscape scenes — a barn at the end of a road, or a ridge dotted with pine trees. Eventually, Stroupe moved on to larger compositions. He painted two murals in the turnkey's office, one on the room's north wall, and another on the east wall. The mural on the north wall is, apparently, all that remains of Stroupe's work.

On January 31, 1970, *The Vidette-Messenger* ran a front-page story on the "jail artist." Stroupe, still awaiting trial on forgery charges, began to sell paintings to the sheriff, deputies, and other residents of Porter County who appreciated his work, either for its novelty or its artistic merit. Stroupe, then forty-six years old, maintained that he had never taken an art lesson in his life and painted only as a hobby. A pair of pictures in the *The Vidette-Messenger* illustrates Stroupe's passion for painting, and the joy he derived from it. One shows him hard at work, putting the finishing touches on the aforementioned mural of a creek in the fall, while the other has Stroupe standing proudly with three of his paintings in hand.

Finally, just under a year from his initial imprisonment in the Porter County Jail, Stroupe's case went to trial. On August 10, 1970, Porter County Superior Court Judge Russell Nixon sentenced Stroupe to one year of probation. Further, the court ordered Stroupe to make restitution of the six checks he forged, totaling about \$860, and to repay his pauper attorney fees. *The Vidette-Messenger*

***Stroupe, still awaiting trial on forgery charges, began to sell paintings to the sheriff, deputies, and other residents of Porter County who appreciated his work.***

reported that Stroupe expressed a willingness to repay these amounts and that he would use money he acquired from selling his art to help him accomplish the task.

Attorney Duane Hartman, who stood in for Blachly as Stroupe's court appointed pauper counsel, noted that his defendant had already spent nearly a year in jail. This fact, along with the good will Stroupe cultivated during his time imprisoned, led Judge Nixon to significantly reduce Stroupe's sentence, which could have included a year in prison and an additional \$500 fine. Nixon, in his closing remarks to Stroupe, said, "People who have observed you while you were in jail feel you deserve this break."

The jail artist was thankful for the opportunity. He noted that much of his trouble was rooted in his addiction to alcohol. Stroupe stated that he had been sober for fifteen months but began drinking again after the death of his mother in March of 1969. It is unclear what role alcohol played in his previous arrest — Stroupe did not seem to connect the two.

Sadly, Stroupe found himself in a nearly identical situation just over a year later. In November 1971, Stroupe made a collect call from Elko, Nevada, to the Porter County Jail, turning himself in for additional fraud charges accrued since his last arrest. Again, Sheriff Crampton traveled west to pick up his "artist in residence." By this time, the two had apparently established something of a friendship. During Stroupe's second trial in Porter County, Sheriff Crampton testified that, if Stroupe were to be incarcerated again, he would like to have him at the Porter County Jail. Crampton maintained that "Bob," as he called him, was a competent, trustworthy person.

According to his probation officer, Dale Gott, Stroupe only contacted the probation office once — two days after his release from the Porter County Jail. Further, Stroupe repaid just one of the six forged checks, and, since skipping town, had accrued hundreds of dollars of debt on Bank of Americards, the precursor to Visa. Stroupe had fallen back on old habits, and, as a result, Gott recommended a one-year sentence to be served on the Indiana State Farm, where the state held misdemeanants.

However, the Indiana State Legislature had recently passed a law that credited jail time previously served to any prison sentence. Stroupe spent 346 days in jail while awaiting his first trial and spent



*Stroupe poses with some of his smaller paintings. January 30, 1970.*

another 111 days awaiting his second trial, which brought his total to 457 days served in the Porter County Jail. With well over a year served in jail, the court had no choice but to release Stroupe. According to the *The Vidette-Messenger*, since Judge Nixon revoked the sentence, he was unable to enforce the restitution payments. Stroupe had caught another break.

Unfortunately, Stroupe's problems persisted. Just under a year later, Sheriff Crampton made yet another journey out west, this time to Amarillo, Texas, to retrieve Stroupe. The troubled artist was wanted for forging checks on the account of his deceased mother. In April of 1973, Porter County Circuit Court Judge Alfred J. Pivarnik sentenced Stroupe to a one-year sentence on the Indiana State Farm in Putnamville.

Stroupe served his time, and, according to a marriage license dated to December 30, 1973, he married a woman named Rosemary Cahill in Clo-

***Again, Sheriff Crampton traveled west to pick up his "artist in residence." By this time, the two had apparently established something of a friendship.***

verdale — just ten miles from the State Farm. It is unclear how Stroupe managed to meet a woman and marry her while incarcerated in an all-male prison, it is even less clear as to what became of their union. After his release from prison, Stroupe seemed to stop forging checks, though he continued to struggle with alcohol, occasionally appearing in *The Vidette-Messenger* and *The Times* for public intoxication. Stroupe probably continued to paint, but he didn't sell his work. He passed away in 1987 at the age of sixty-three in Sandusky, Ohio. ■

# Rose's Jail

by Asa Kerr



Print of the Porter County Jail and Sheriff's Residence.  
Date unknown.

In early March 1870, a snowstorm ripped through Chicago, blanketing the city and surrounding region in heavy, wet snow. Architect Rufus Rose could only watch as the roofs of both of the new wings to the Cook County Courthouse collapsed “with a crash that was heard half a mile.” Rose, along with his partner Cass Chapman, had designed the wings and superintended their construction for about two and a half years prior to the storm.

A lengthy investigation ensued. When examiners discovered cracks in the supporting wall of each wing, they assumed that they had found the cause of the collapse. However, John Van Osdel, known as “Chicago’s first architect,” noted in a letter to the editor of *The Chicago Tribune* that, due to the clay subsoil of the city, a structure’s outer walls were almost guaranteed to sink into the earth and crack, especially if those walls were heavy.<sup>1</sup> Any building whose walls have not yet cracked, he wrote, had simply not yet arrived at “its cracking time.”

The problem with the new east and west wings of the building was not the walls, but the roof. The Recorder’s Court indicted Rose, Chapman, and members of the Board of Public Works for maintaining a public nuisance. From there, the result of their punishment is unclear. About a year and a half later, the Great Chicago Fire of October 1871 swept through the city and reduced the “Old Chicago Courthouse” to rubble.

Even before the fire, Rose found additional

**December 1870** Porter County Board of Commissioners purchase plot of land at corner of Franklin and Mechanic

**October 1871** The Great Fire devastates Chicago

**March 1871** Construction begins on the new Porter County Jail



The old Central School Building designed by R. Rose, 1905.  
From the collection of Steven Shook.

work. The Chicago architect furnished the plans for two structures, a school and a jail, in a prosperous small city located on the periphery of Chicago’s hinterlands — Valparaiso. The three-story brick school building possessed two large towers, from which contemporary observers said it was possible to see the towns of Wheeler and Wanatah. It served as the Valparaiso high school for over thirty years, until the more practical Central School building replaced it in 1904. The jail, on the other hand, still stands today. Although it no longer serves as the county jail, the structure continued in this function for just over 100 years.

In December 1870, the Porter County Board of Commissioners gathered to purchase a plot of land just off the Courthouse square from Franklin W. Hunt, a merchant and banker, for the cost of \$2,200 “upon which to erect a jail.”<sup>2</sup> In the March 1871 session, after examining several bids for the construction of a jail, the Board awarded the contract to local builders Christian Lembke and Samuel Shade. Rose, of course, provided the architectural plans. The total cost of the contract was set at \$24,325.

When the county purchased the land, a residence, presumably belonging to Hunt, already stood on the north end of the property facing Mechanic Street, now Indiana Avenue. The commissioners planned to use the two-story brick Italianate home as a sheriff’s residence.<sup>3</sup> The builders, then, would simply tack a jail onto the back of the house.

The various county histories recount the ex-

<sup>1</sup> Van Osdel constructed the original courthouse and built a courthouse in LaPorte, which was later replaced. He is considered a peer of famous Chicago architects Adler, Burnham, Sullivan, Root, and Wright.

<sup>2</sup> Lot number four in block number twenty nine in the Old Survey of the town, now city, of Valparaiso.

<sup>3</sup> It was a common practice at this time in rural communities across the Midwest for sheriffs to live in a home connected, or in close proximity, to the jail they administered.

istence of a log jail, built simultaneously with the first courthouse in 1838. Generally, they agree that it was around, or exactly upon, the same location as the jail started in 1871. However, by the time construction began on the new jail, it appears that county authorities had long since removed the log structure, or, if nothing else, abandoned it to rot.

The meeting minutes of the Porter County Board of Commissioners reveal the distinct need for a proper county jail. Between the beginning of the construction on the jail and its completion a bit over a year later, there were at least seventeen instances in which the county paid for the transport of prisoners to and from the LaPorte County Jail. Further, in the same period of time, the county paid LaPorte County Sheriff Daniel L. Brown over \$200 to board its prisoners. The construction of a jail would save the county money in the long run and eliminate the logistical headache of transporting prisoners back and forth from LaPorte.

Aside from a desire to save money, community pride also played a role in the decision to construct a state-of-the-art jail in Porter County. In a letter written to *The Democratic Messenger* in September 1871, one Porter County resident noted that, “our county jail, when finished, will be a palace to look at...for external beauty and internal arrangements, for comforts to the inmates and perfect security, it will not be exceeded by any prison in the state.” Rose’s plans for the jail included four imposing towers that rose above the central structure at each of its four corners. The towers featured decorative crenels and merlons evoking medieval battlements. The jail’s neo-gothic style served no practical function, rather, its faux-defensive properties enforced the notion that this structure would serve to protect society from enemies, real or imagined. The large blocks of Joliet stone that composed the jail were certainly not ornamental. As the jail aged, various problems with the structure arose — none of these included the strength of its walls.

By December 1872, Shade and Lembke had completed construction of the jail. The county paid S.R. Bryant \$101.50 to insure the jail and provided William Frampton with \$22.23 for cleaning it fully before prisoners moved into the structure. The Valparaiso Woolen Manufacturing Company provided blankets to be used by inmates of the jail at a cost of \$48.60. Finally, Sheriff Robert P. Jones moved into the residence, and the jail began to serve its purpose in earnest.

**As the jail aged, various problems with the structure arose—none of these included the strength of its walls.**

**December 1872**  
Construction completed on the new Porter County Jail

**March 1929**  
Grand Jury of Porter County Circuit Court recommends updates to jail

**April 1939**  
Indiana State Department of Public Welfare pushes the county to remodel the jail

**May 1949**  
A state jail inspector visits the jail and declares it, “the worst lockup in Indiana, with few exceptions”

**April 1973**  
Porter County Historical Society moves its collection into former Porter County Jail

From 1872 until 1973, this structure served as the Porter County Jail. The jail, deemed one of the best in Indiana at the time it opened, eventually outgrew the designation. By 1929, the Grand Jury of the Porter County Circuit Court reported that “many things in connection with the jail were obsolete and out of date.” Apparently, various grand juries had consistently made these remarks in preceding years.

By 1939, inspectors for the Indiana State Department of Public Welfare pushed the county to remodel the jail. Inspector C. O. Fields noted that minor repairs would be insufficient and recommended a complete modernization of the jail interior to provide “proper facilities for security, safety, sex separation, classification and segregation of prisoners.” At this point, the jail was a single story structure with an eighteen-foot high ceiling. Most male prisoners stayed in the main cell block, while female and juvenile inmates stayed in one of the two tower cells, which were only accessible by a doorway in the upstairs of the sheriff’s residence.

One of Fields’ major recommendations was for the addition of a mezzanine balcony, and a stairway connecting to it, that would allow jailers to access the tower cells without traveling through the residence. The balcony would course along the east, south, and west walls of the jail. The county board agreed with his evaluation and asked East Chicago architect C. I. Botteron to draw plans for the addition of a balcony and staircase.

The work progressed smoothly, until Sheriff Freeman Lane discovered that adding a balcony opened an avenue of escape for a crafty prisoner. According to Lane, “all a prisoner has to do is cut a couple of bars, admitting him to the mezzanine floor, from there he could rip off some tin covering the ceiling, and lift himself up into the attic that leads to a loft directly over the sheriff’s residence,” at this point, the prisoner would be able to enter the residence through a stairway connecting the attic to the second floor. Botteron adjusted his plans accordingly; this, of course, came at an extra cost.

The county board found themselves in a similar position in 1949. According to Sheriff Lester Hine-line, a state jail inspector who visited the structure called it, “the worst lockup in Indiana, with few exceptions.” The inspector reportedly told Hine-line that, if changes were not made before his next visit, he would have no choice but to “turn the lock in the key,” and shut down the jail. Though helpful, the



Photograph of the old Porter County Jail and former Sheriff’s Residence taken in the early 1970s.

previous renovations had not accomplished enough to fully modernize the jail.

Due to a steel and concrete shortage brought on by World War II, the County Board had been unable to secure any bids on contracts for work on the jail. Most contractors simply did not have enough materials to complete the job. By 1949, however, the county board secured two bids, one on concrete work and another on steel work, so that much needed renovations could begin. To avoid shutting down, the county needed to create additional space to house prisoners, and to do so in a way that aligned with current health and safety standards.

In order to accomplish this task, the board sought to create a second floor above the jail’s ground floor, thereby making the jail a two-story structure. In conjunction with this work, the board ordered a completely new set of steel cells, which would be installed after Fred Slather, a Hammond contractor, had poured a new concrete ground floor and a concrete second floor. Decatur Iron and Steel Works of Decatur, Alabama, manufactured and installed the new cells. The entire cost of this renova-

**A state jail inspector who visited the structure called it, “the worst lockup in Indiana, with few exceptions.”**

tion was just over \$30,000 and finished in January 1950.

These immense changes allowed the jail to hobble along for over twenty years. Eventually, the building’s aged design became too great an obstacle to the safety and comfort of both prisoners and jailers. In January 1973, county officials dedicated a new jail structure immediately south of the old jail — the cost of construction was around \$2 million. As the prisoners and jailers moved out of the century-old building, another entity prepared to move in: The Porter County Museum. We are still here today, and, as the structure celebrates its 150th birthday, we would like to offer a hearty thanks to Rose, Shade, Lembke, and all of those builders and workers who have maintained this building throughout its long life. ■

*This bird's-eye view of downtown Valparaiso looking southeast toward College Hill was taken before 1893, as the Memorial Opera House had not yet been built. The old Porter County Jail and former Sheriff's residence can be seen in the bottom right portion of the image.*



# The Life and Crimes of Catherine Cassler

by Steven Shook

The alley was icy, and it had been raining during the evening of December 6, 1926. The soles on the shoes of the dead man sprawled across this alley, however, were dry.



Photograph of Catherine Cassler taken after her murder conviction for killing William Lindstrom for insurance money, May 1927. From the collection of Steven R. Shook.

Chicago Police Captain Dennis Carroll immediately recognized that the dead man had not slipped and fallen, fatally hitting his head and fracturing his skull on the ground. Rather, it appeared more likely that the man was murdered and his body dumped and displayed in such a manner that suggested an accidental death. Police soon identified the dead man in the alley as William Lindstrom.

What occurred that miserable evening to result in Lindstrom's body being dumped in the alley behind 2120 Huron Street in Chicago? The investigation conducted by the Chicago Police Department uncovered a plot among three individuals that involved the collection and distribution of insurance money upon the accidental death of William Lindstrom.

The story of Lindstrom's murder begins with Catherine Marie Cassler, born on July 3, 1891, in Lafayette, Indiana. Fourteen-year-old Catherine Marie Morris married twenty-two-year-old Truman Charles Cassler in September 1905. At that particular time, marrying at the age of fourteen in Indiana was forbidden by law, so apparently Catherine lied about her age, as the marriage record clearly indicates that she was born on July 3, 1885. Thus, when Catherine married Truman, she was representing herself as a twenty-year-old woman rather than a fourteen-year-old girl.

Catherine Cassler, her husband Truman Cassler, and their son Edward resided in Chicago for many years. In 1924, Catherine and Truman Cassler purchased a home located in Hebron. Truman Cassler was born in the small community of Burdick, east of Chesterton, and later resid-

ed in Pleasant Township after his father passed away. Thus, the Cassler's move to Porter County was somewhat of a "homecoming."

Truman Cassler remained employed by a moving company in Chicago when the family moved to their cottage home in Hebron. He would stay in Chicago over the workweek and then return home to Hebron on the weekends.

Also taking on a major role in the murder of William Lindstrom is Loren Patrick. Patrick was born near Hebron in 1882. He and Truman Cassler were about the same age and may have known one another when they were in school. Patrick resided with the Cassler family in Hebron, helping them with various household tasks and working at the grain elevator.

On May 30, 1925, Patrick and Catherine Cassler were arrested at Cassler's Hebron home by Porter County Sheriff William B. Forney on a charge of bootlegging. Five quarts of alcohol and one pint of kummel, a sweet liqueur flavored with caraway seeds, cumin, and fennel, were found in the Cassler home.

Cassler, who was an active member of the local Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.), claimed that she was working as an undercover agent for federal prohibition agents. Her undercover activities, she stated, explained the presence of alcohol in her home. Sheriff Forney, however, had discovered evidence that she was double-crossing federal agents.

Interestingly, Hebron resident Capitola Dilley, the President of the Porter County W.C.T.U., and Reverend A. T. Neblung appeared on Cassler's behalf. Both individuals testified that they were convinced that Cassler was working as an undercover Prohibition agent. However, the evidence countering their claim must have been overwhelming, as Cassler eventually pleaded guilty. She was sentenced to six months at the Indiana Women's Prison located in Indianapolis and was fined \$200.

Patrick was also tried for bootlegging. After posting a \$1,000 bond, he disappeared and did not show for his hearings. Eventually, Patrick was found, convicted, and sentenced to two months incarceration at the Indiana State Penal Farm in Putnam County.

In November 1926, the Cassler family moved to nearby Crown Point, where they rented a house, and Loren Patrick moved with them. The family explained that they had moved from Hebron to Crown Point because they believed the latter afforded their son Edward a better education, and it was much more convenient for Truman Cassler to travel to and from Chicago for his employment.

While residing in Porter County, Catherine Cassler had become an acquaintance of Lillian Gray, who later married Joseph C. Fraser. Gray and Fraser eventually moved to Chicago and kept a boarder named William Tunyea. Tunyea worked as a cabinetmaker and furniture finisher in Chicago. At some point Tunyea and Gray became intimate, and in October 1922, they moved out of Fraser's home and set up their own household. Tunyea also took on an alias, changing his name to William Lindstrom. After moving around the city, the couple finally settled in to a basement apartment at 2114 West North Avenue.

While living with Lindstrom, Gray secretly met her husband, Fraser, three or four times a week. Gray told Fraser that she wanted to leave Lindstrom. She had also written a letter to her friend Catherine Cassler asking her to come for a visit; Cassler complied with Gray's request. During the visit at Gray's home, Gray asked Cassler how she could be freed from Lindstrom. Cassler began to devise a plan.

Cassler later discovered that Lindstrom's life was insured, and Gray was the beneficiary. Cassler then told Gray that she knew of a man who, for a few

hundred dollars, would be willing to kill Lindstrom. Lindstrom's death would be made to appear as an accident so that the insurance funds could be collected. Cassler was referring to her hired man, Loren Patrick.

After much planning and little action, Gray met with Patrick in his automobile outside her apartment on December 6, 1926. Patrick insisted that they murder Lindstrom that evening. Reportedly, Lindstrom had wanted to sell some of his furniture. Patrick devised a plan whereby he would represent himself as a farmer from Michigan who had sold his farm, moved to the Chicago area, and was in the market to purchase furniture for his new home.

Later that evening, Patrick, presenting himself as a farmer, came to the apartment to look over Lindstrom's furniture. As Lindstrom showed Patrick the different pieces, Patrick found an opportune moment and struck William over the head with a lead pipe that Gray had discretely passed to him during the tour. Lindstrom slumped to the floor dead.

Gray then went to find Cassler, who was waiting in an automobile a few doors west of the apartment. The three conspirators then carried Lindstrom's body out of the building and placed it onto the floor of the automobile. Patrick drove away with the body and dumped it in an alley behind a townhouse located at 2120 Huron Street.

Early the following morning Gray called the police, informing them that Lindstrom had left their apartment around 10:30 pm the previous evening to visit a drug store and failed to return. At about 6:30 am, Gray ventured to the North Avenue police precinct and again reported that Lindstrom was missing. Upon returning to her apartment, she soon received a telephone call from a police officer informing her that a body had been discovered nearby in an alley, which Gray later identified as Lindstrom.



The police released Gray, under her promise to return at a specific time. Gray did not return. Instead, Gray met her husband, Joseph Fraser, who had purchased her a railroad ticket to Crown Point. Upon reaching Crown Point, Gray immediately headed for the Cassler residence.

On December 11, Patrick, Gray, and Cassler drove from Crown Point to the home of Ed Rice in Hebron. Gray worked in Rice's home for one week, under an alias. At the end of the week, Gray returned to Chicago. On December 21, Gray called the North Avenue police precinct to learn more about their investigation into Lindstrom's murder. She was immediately taken into custody.

During their investigation, police learned that Gray was the beneficiary of a \$7,500 insurance policy on Lindstrom's life. Eventually, Gray succumbed to questioning and admitted to her involvement in the murder. She also snitched on Patrick and Cassler.

Cassler developed a story that suggested she was unaware of the murder of Lindstrom until Gray had arrived at her home in Crown Point. Patrick, however, immediately confessed to the murder of Lindstrom "as a favor" for Gray since Cassler had previously assisted Patrick in getting out of jail. Patrick was reported to be rather nonchalant about the murder, the clubbing death, "weighed so little on his conscience, he told police, that he scarcely gave it a thought."

When Patrick admitted that he killed Lindstrom with a lead pipe, he also revealed his motive. Gray was supposed to pay him \$137.50 for completing the task. Patrick was then to use that money to reimburse Cassler for paying Loren's bootlegging fine. The crime immediately found headlines across the nation's newspapers, likely due to the elaborate scheme and the connection to bootlegging during Prohibition.

Both Patrick and Gray immediately struck a deal with prosecutors. They would plead guilty to the murder of



Newspaper photograph of Lillian J. (Gray) Fraser. Lillian was the common law wife of murder victim William Lindstrom. From The Hamilton Daily News, December 27, 1926.

Lindstrom in order to avoid trial and a highly probable death sentence. The plea deal also required that they testify against Cassler. Cassler was offered a similar plea deal to avoid a possible death penalty, but she declined it.

Cassler's murder trial began in May 1927 in Cook County's Criminal Court before Judge Phillip L. Sullivan. Gray and Patrick kept their promise to testify against Cassler and detailed the particulars of the crime. Gray also testified that Cassler was a "bootlegger," and Patrick testified that he indeed drove an "alcohol truck" to deliver liquor from Porter County to Chicago.

Patrick stated during Cassler's trial that he had been arrested in Hebron for bootlegging and that Cassler and Gray had paid his \$160 fine. He alleged that the two women asked him to kill Lindstrom.

On May 19, 1927, the jury convicted Cassler of murdering Lindstrom and

recommended that she be hanged. It was widely reported that Cassler smiled when the verdict was read, and smiled again as she was led away from the courtroom. Several members of the press met with Cassler in her jail cell the day after the verdict and reported that she was still smiling. However, she was quoted as stating, "I expected punishment. Not this much however. I am not guilty of the murder, although I will admit being guilty as an accessory after the fact."

Judge Sullivan rendered his sentence on June 24, 1927. Gray and Patrick were sentenced to life in prison. Judge Sullivan followed the jury's recommendation and sentenced Cassler to hang on October 21, 1927. His sentence received broad coverage in national newspapers, since no woman had ever been hanged in Illinois. Asked immediately after the sentence was rendered whether she had anything to say, Cassler, in a trembling response, said, "No nothing."

Meanwhile, the imprisoned Patrick had changed his story and stated that Cassler had nothing to do with Lindstrom's death.

Within twenty-four hours of her scheduled appointment with the gallows, Cassler's attorneys were able to successfully secure a 60-day stay of execution, which allowed for an appeal to the Supreme Court of Illinois. On December 21, 1927, this court granted a review of Cassler's trial and conviction.

In this case, decided on October 25, 1928, the Supreme Court of Illinois reversed and remanded Cassler's case back to Judge Sullivan's court. Cassler's attorney argued that Judge Sullivan had erred in not allowing motions for a new trial. The motions were based on the defendant's claim that Judge Sullivan had allowed, "incompetent and prejudicial evidence" to be introduced at trial and incorrectly instructed the jury. Her attorney also argued that the weight of the evidence against Cassler did not support the jury's verdict. The Supreme Court of Illinois agreed, indicating that

there was reasonable doubt as to Cassler's guilt, and overturned her verdict.

Prosecutors intended to retry Cassler. Gray, however, died suddenly on March 24, 1929, in prison. Patrick refused to testify for the state. The case was simply too weak without testimony from the co-conspirators. Given the circumstances, Cassler was removed from the shadow of the noose and released from prison on April 29, 1929. Cassler had successfully escaped the death penalty. Had Gray not died suddenly in prison, it is likely that Cassler would have served a lengthy prison sentence as an accessory to murder.

This is not the end of Catherine Cassler's life of crime.

On May 30, 1929, four weeks after Cassler's release from prison, two boys discovered the body of a young woman face down and covered with a thin layer of twigs in a swampy area south of Hebron along the Kankakee River. It was the body of Cammeola Soutar, a twenty-four-year-old professional dancer and roller skater commonly referred to as "Cammie." She had been missing three days. Soutar was murdered, her death caused by a single 32-caliber bullet through her heart. No other signs of injury or violence were found on the body.

Soutar resided in Chicago. However, while Cassler was in jail charged with the murder of Lindstrom, Soutar had taken up residence with Catherine Cassler's husband, Truman Cassler, as a housekeeper.

On June 3, 1929, a coroner's inquest was held to determine the cause and circumstances surrounding Soutar's death. Over the course of the day, numerous pieces of circumstantial evidence strongly pointed to Cassler's involvement in Soutar's murder. Soutar's watch was found in Cassler's Valparaiso home. Witnesses testified that they overheard Cassler threatening Soutar, that Soutar was at Cassler's residence the day she vanished, and that Cassler was



Above, Truman Cassler (left), husband of accused woman, who confessed a secret romance with Miss-Soutar. At right, photo of the slain girl in bathing costume.

Large photo shows, left to right, Chester Johnson, Mrs. Cassler's accuser; Assistant State's Attorney Walker Butler, and Lillian Malott, a chum of the slain girl. They are examining beads which led to Miss Soutar's identification after finding of body in swamp. Directly above is Mrs. Catherine Cassler. —Courtesy The Chicago Herald & Examiner

Chicago, she had searched for Soutar, found her, and then, "gave her a beating." Afterward, Soutar had moved back to Chicago.

Witnesses stated that Soutar had gone to visit with Cassler at her Valparaiso home on May 27 to "make her see reason," possibly sensing future danger and trying to make peace. The alleged affair with Truman Cassler was all the more incredible since Soutar was recently engaged to Chester Johnson, her roller skating partner.

Truman Cassler also testified that

when he arrived home on the evening of May 27, he found "such an air of tensesness that he pressed inquiries upon his wife and son." Truman Cassler alleged that his wife had boasted that Soutar would never call upon him again "because she has gone away."

Truman Cassler confronted his wife at the coroner's inquest. He stated, "You know you pulled a gun on me and Cammie." Cassler responded, "That's a lie. I never had a gun of any sort at any time since I got out of jail." Truman Cassler then stated, "I saw you in jail and told you I was going to divorce you and marry Cammie and you said we'd never live to get married if you got free. Isn't that right?" Cassler answered quietly saying, "That's a lie. I never threatened her or you. I never threatened anybody."

Investigators then learned that on May 28, Cassler and her son, Edward, went to Chicago to visit with her sister, Grace Stringham. While visiting, the pair rummaged through a trunk of clothing that Cassler had left there. Detectives searched the trunk on June 2 and found twelve 32-caliber bullets wrapped in one of Cassler's handkerchiefs.

Detectives also found a letter at Cassler's home written by Fred Glackin informing Cassler of her husband's affair. Detectives found another letter in Cassler's home, in which Cassler tells the intended recipient that "she was well aware of the relationship because Cammie had visited her in jail and had taunted her with the fact that she had been living with [Truman] Cassler." She also states in the letter that, "only the steel screen between us kept me from getting at her."

A final piece of circumstantial evidence reported during the first day of the coroner's inquest came from residents of Hebron. They stated that the old Cassler home in Hebron, which was foreclosed when Truman Cassler left for Chicago to assist his wife in the Lindstrom murder case, had been lighted up at night for the last two weeks of May.



*Photograph of William F. Antrim, Town Marshal of Hebron, and Sergeant William Smith of the Chicago Police Department, raking over the stove coals in the former Hebron home of Catherine Cassler in search of clues, December 1926. From the collection of Steven Shook.*

On June 4, the day of Soutar's burial, Catherine Cassler took the witness stand to deny any involvement in the murder. Newspaper reports covering the inquest state that the courtroom was packed with observers and press. Cassler said she did not harm Soutar. She said she had once slapped Soutar in the face for a remark that she made after being ordered out of the Cassler home. Cassler also testified that she learned that her husband had contracted a venereal disease from Soutar.

A neighbor living across from the Cassler's Valparaiso apartment provided some of the most incriminating testimony. She stated that Cassler had told her that she had used force against Soutar to keep her away from her husband. The neighbor also placed Cassler and Soutar together just prior to the alleged murder.

Porter County Prosecutor William W. Bozarth had warrants prepared for Catherine and Truman Cassler, their son Edward Cassler, and Chester Johnson, Soutar's fiance, prior to the conclu-

sion of the second day of testimony at the coroner's inquest. Sheriff Burney Maxwell signed the warrants. Immediately after the inquest testimony concluded, Deputy Sheriff Freeman Lane escorted Cassler across the street to the office of the Justice of the Peace. Lane then read the warrant charging her with murder.

On June 5, Prosecutor Bozarth filed an affidavit in the court of G. E. Bornholt, Justice of the Peace, charging Cassler with first degree murder. He also charged Truman Cassler, Edward Cassler, and Chester Johnson as accessories or material witnesses to the murder.

Additional evidence was collected while the Casslers were held for trial. Edward Cassler was taken to the swamp, presumably to see if any information could be pried from him. In addition, a massive search took place to determine if the gun used to murder Soutar was disposed of in the swamp.

August R. Kueniger, a farmer who lived near the swamp, overhead authorities asking Edward Cassler whether he

had been on the rarely used road that passed near the swamp. He said he had not. Kueniger interrupted stating, "why, I've seen this young fellow and his mother driving along this road half a dozen times." Kueniger was immediately sworn in as a witness and testified that he knew both Catherine and Edward Cassler well and that he was positive he had seen them traveling the road.

At court, Ira C. Tilton, Cassler's defense attorney, moved that the Casslers be discharged since there was insufficient evidence to place any guilt or to connect Cassler with Soutar's murder. His motion was denied and the case was certified to the Porter Circuit Court and the courtroom of Judge Grant A. Crumpacker. After hearing the case, the grand jury issued a murder indictment for Catherine and Edward Cassler.

On July 5, 1929, Catherine and Edward Cassler were formally arraigned in the Porter Circuit Court. They entered pleas of not guilty. Tilton again submitted motions for the release of his clients due to insufficient evidence, which Judge Crumpacker denied.

By September 30, 1929, it was reported that the prosecutors in the Cassler case were having great difficulty in fixing the location of Soutar's murder. While the discovery of her remains in a swamp in south Porter County provided prima facie evidence of a murder taking place within the county, the prosecution believed that defense attorney Tilton would convince a jury that Soutar's murder took place outside of Porter County and her body was dumped in the swamp. The prosecution was also reportedly concerned about the cost to taxpayers should the Cassler murder cases proceed to trial, as both the prosecution and defense were paid through taxpayer funds.

On October 7, 1929, the court dismissed murder charges against the Casslers due to insufficient evidence. Furthermore, the Illinois State Attorney announced that the Casslers would not be held in Illinois for the Soutar slaying,

probably due to a lack of sufficient evidence. When Catherine and Edward Cassler were released from the Porter County Jail on the morning of October 7, 1929, a Chicago newspaper photographer attempted to photograph them. Cassler remarked, "Aw, go to hell," and walked away.

After her release, Catherine Cassler separated from Truman Cassler. She reportedly moved to Missouri to reside with an aunt. Truman Cassler briefly lived with his brother Calvin in LaPorte and then his sister in Michigan City. Cassler stated to the press that her husband was willing to live with her, but that she had not given him a definite response.

Once again, the dismissal of charges in the case of Cammeola Soutar's murder was not the end of Catherine Cassler's alleged involvement in criminal activity.

Sometime during the early morning of March 18, 1937, the corpse of Warren Shattuck was found in an alley behind a house in Chicago. Given the condition of the body, it appeared that Shattuck perished the previous evening. The owner of the house was Catherine Cassler. Shattuck was a boarder at the Cassler house.

Shattuck's death certificate indicates that his death was caused by a, "skull fracture due to external violence" and that the "deceased supposedly lost balance and fell over banister from third floor to ground below." The coroner also indicated that the death was "accidental" rather than suicidal or homicidal.

Given the circumstances, Cassler was not under any great suspicion with respect to Shattuck's death. Her problems arose, however, when she informed the jury members at the coroner's inquest that she was Shattuck's mother and then almost immediately afterward applied as a beneficiary for Shattuck's life insurance as his aunt. Cassler was neither Shattuck's mother nor his aunt.

Chicago Police quickly took Cassler into custody. She explained that, "he

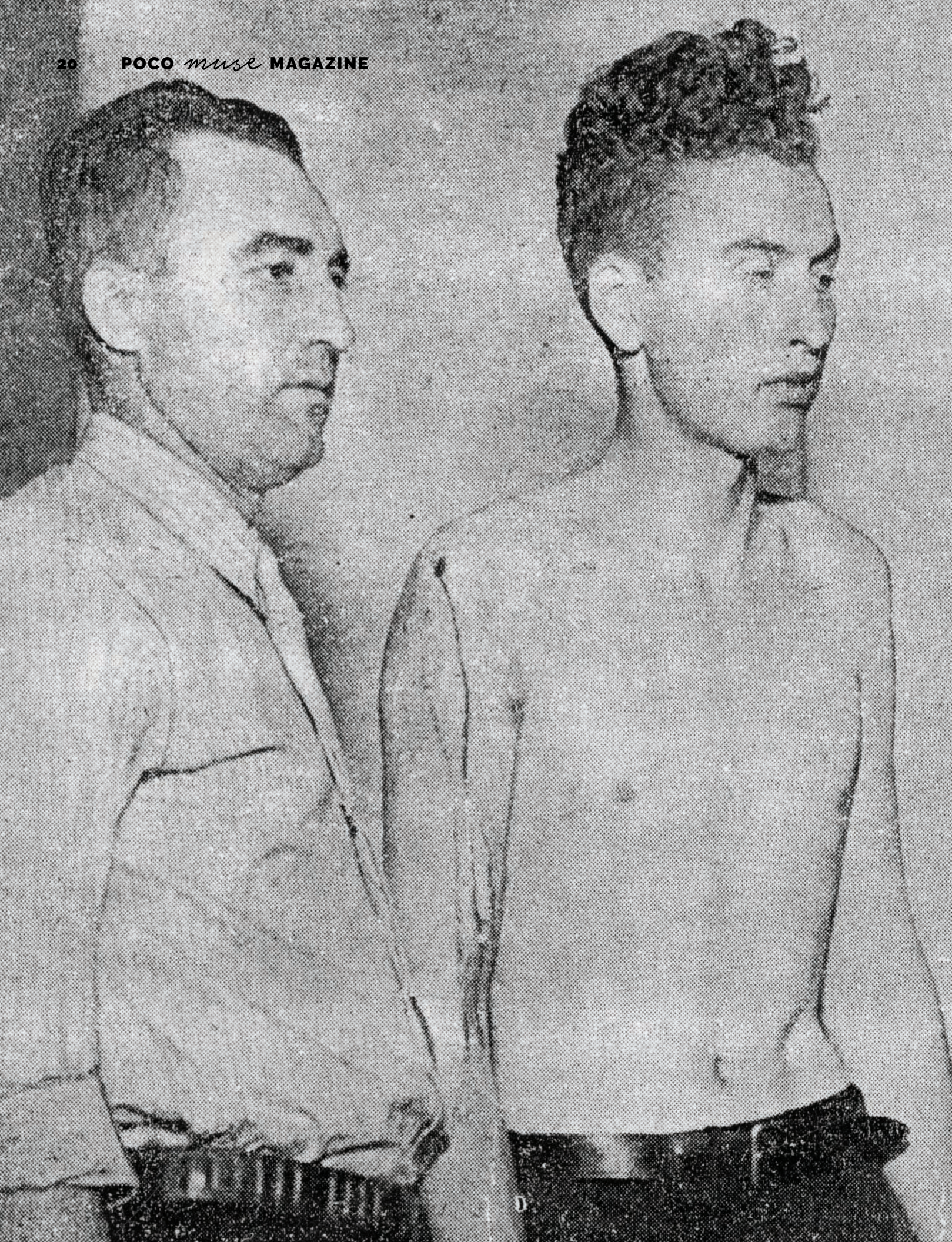
[Warren Shattuck] always called me mother, and the neighbors knew me as his mother. That's one of the reasons I swore at the inquest that I was his mother. The other reason was that I did not want to stir the old trouble." Cassler also stated that Shattuck's stepfather, Hans Koepke, felt she was justified in posing as Shattuck's mother.

Investigators soon learned that Shattuck had purchased two life insurance policies in 1936, the year before his death, totaling \$600, which included double indemnity clauses for violent death. The beneficiary of one of the two policies was Catherine Cassler. Cassler informed investigators that Shattuck was short on money and that he had asked for assistance in paying 40 cents a week to pay the premiums on the two policies. Cassler also stated she was unaware that she was a beneficiary on one of the policies until about a week before Shattuck's death.

Cassler waived the insurance claim and, quite remarkably, the police discontinued their investigation into Shattuck's suspicious death. Shattuck's death remained to be classified as "accidental."

Either Catherine Cassler experienced considerable bad luck during her lifetime or, as is more likely the case, she was the recipient of incredible good luck in having avoided any penalties associated with her involvement in the deaths of William Lindstrom, Cammeola Soutar, and Warren Shattuck. Catherine admitted her involvement in the Lindstrom murder, and the circumstantial evidence of her involvement in Soutar's murder seemed to be overwhelming. Yet, she remained a free woman.

Cassler passed away at Englewood Hospital in Chicago due to an acute coronary occlusion on September 19, 1954, at the age of 63. The truth surrounding the deaths of Lindstrom, Soutar, and Shattuck were buried with her. ■



# From the Collection

Spotlighting artifacts from the museum collection which help tell the story of the infamous Easton Brothers

## The Easton Brothers

In the summer of 1938, the brothers Orelle and Clarence Easton left their home in North Dakota for a life of crime on the road. The young pair initially showed little sign of the murderous spirit that would gain them infamy — they began to steal chiefly out of a desire for money, and, perhaps, a bit of adventure. The Eastons robbed a variety of individuals and businesses in Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana before their stolen Plymouth sedan broke down on the side of Fail Road outside of La Porte.

Indiana State Police Officer W. Ray Dixon happened across the brothers. He pulled over to investigate the disabled sedan, especially since it had Michigan plates. After Dixon got out of his car and approached the scene, Orelle pulled his gun and shot the officer four times. Dixon survived for some time, though his wounds eventually proved fatal.

The shooting of Dixon roused the ire of surrounding police forces. The Four State Pact, an agreement between Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan, allowed officers of these states to cross state lines in order to aid in the capture of desperate criminals, such as the infamous John Dillinger and Al Brady. So it was that a swarm of Indiana officers followed the Easton brothers as they fled across the Illinois border.

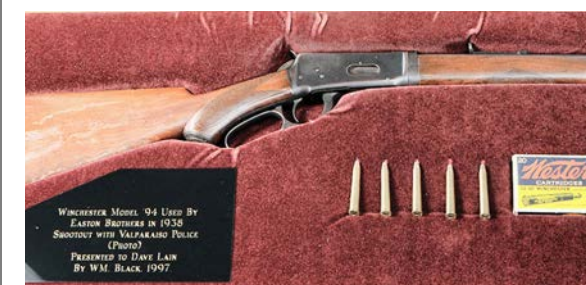
Finally, a bulletproof squad car from the Valparaiso Police Department spotted the brothers' car mired on a farm near Deselm, IL. The brothers refused to surrender and a lengthy gunfight ensued. The men in the Valparaiso squad car were able to hold up the brothers long enough for more police to arrive. The combined numbers of law enforcement proved overwhelming for the heavily armed criminals. Eventually, police shot and killed Clarence and captured Orelle. By the end of the fight, more than 200 officers had arrived at the scene. The State Supreme Court sentenced Orelle Easton to death in the electric chair in the death house of the State Prison in Michigan City. ■

**Left** Orelle Easton, with a wounded shoulder, is questioned by Deputy Sheriffs Clinton Craig and Jesse Burton (out of frame).

**Top** Photograph of the bulletproof and armor-plated Valparaiso Police squad car after the shootout with the Eastons. Valparaiso Police Chief A.C. Witters, Captain Charles Gilliland, and Porter County Sheriff Freeman Lane drove this car across the Illinois state line in pursuit of the Easton brothers.

**Middle** This cast of Orelle Easton's face was taken after his execution in Michigan City for the murder of Indiana State Police officer W. Ray Dixon of the Chesterton Post. Four death masks were made, but this is the last known in existence.

**Bottom** The Winchester Model '94 used by the Easton Brothers was used in their shootout with police near Deselm, Illinois.



# Rebel Without A Cause

Review by Jeff Schultz, Official PoCo Muse Film Critic

Every generation has its growing pains and a story about them. For many teenagers in the 1950s, that story was *Rebel Without a Cause*, a drama about alienated suburban youth filmed in the lustrous 35 mm CinemaScope format with WarnerColor.

Filmgoers at Valparaiso's Premier Theatre in 1956 met Judy, an upset young woman who is picked up by the police for breaking curfew; Plato, an orphaned teen who is in hot water for allegedly shooting puppies; and Jim, who in "just plain drunkenness" clutches a wind-up toy monkey, pummels the police inspector's desk with his fists and hums Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries." But what is really going on inside these characters? Who or what is to blame for their brokenness? Is there no cause like the title suggests?

Movies about troubled teenagers are almost as old as the movies themselves. From the silents to the talkies, young characters would be tempted by societal vices like drugs or choosing to run with criminals. The passage of youth has only two outcomes in these movies: a virtuous life or a condemned one.

Much of the juvenile delinquent film genre had been done as exploitation or sensational exposés. It was bold of *Rebel Without a Cause* to take a more honest and poetic approach to the problem by not pointing to a corruptor like booze or dope, but speculating it could have something to do with a dysfunctional family structure.

You can't get much further talking about the movie without mentioning the film's star James Dean who plays Jim. Dean became a movie star overnight with his first starring role in *East of Eden* which came out earlier the same year. By the time *Rebel Without a Cause* was in theaters, Dean's persona reached legendary status not because of the movies, but because his nascent and sensational rise to Hollywood stardom was cut off short by his death in a car crash weeks earlier. Hoosiers were affected by the fact Dean hailed from Indiana. Growing up in Fairmount between Fort Wayne and Indianapolis, Dean moved to California after he graduated high school to pursue acting.

Dean's Indiana connection probably drove a number of people to the Premier Theatre who were



awed by his performance, not knowing that it would remain iconic to this day. He plays Jim as a forlorn, sympathetic character that can't seem to fit in no matter how many towns he moves to. Premier patrons would likely recognize the star who plays Judy — Natalie Wood. However, it might have rattled adults seeing Wood, the cherubic child from 1940s films like *Miracle on 34th Street*, now in a grown-up role smoking behind bushes, going for joy rides with boys, and dealing with the awkward effects of puberty. Playing Plato is Sal Mineo who was not as well known.

Apart from the generation gap between teens and parents, much of the film's external conflict deals with Jim trying to gain honor from his peers once he's challenged by the school's alpha male Buzz Gunderson to a scuffle with switchblades following a field trip to the Griffith Observatory and later a "chickie run." The pensive Jim asks, "Why do we do this?" to Buzz who replies, "You got to do something, now don't you?" We hear these kinds of blanket statements throughout the film from other characters as to why adolescents act this way without anyone taking responsibility. "It's just the age," Judy's mom says a cop out from having to deal directly with her daughter's anguish. The movie raises these questions to the audience and challenges it to provide its own resolve.

I give *Rebel Without a Cause* three out four stars but with the caveat that I could rate it higher after a subsequent viewing. I found the music and the use of CinemaScope photography enthralling as well as the performances by its three breakout stars, but the melancholic tone along with knowing Dean's fate made it an eerie and somber experience.

There is no denying the way *Rebel Without a Cause* has influenced teen dramas. You can see shows today like *13 Reasons Why* and *Euphoria* working in its wake as they depict Generation Z's coming of age. After *Rebel*, Dean would appear posthumously in one more movie, 1956's Texan epic *Giant*. He would be nominated for his work there and in *East of Eden* for an Academy Award but, ironically, not for *Rebel* which made him immortal. Even the Premier must have felt it the way Dean appears in these ads. ■



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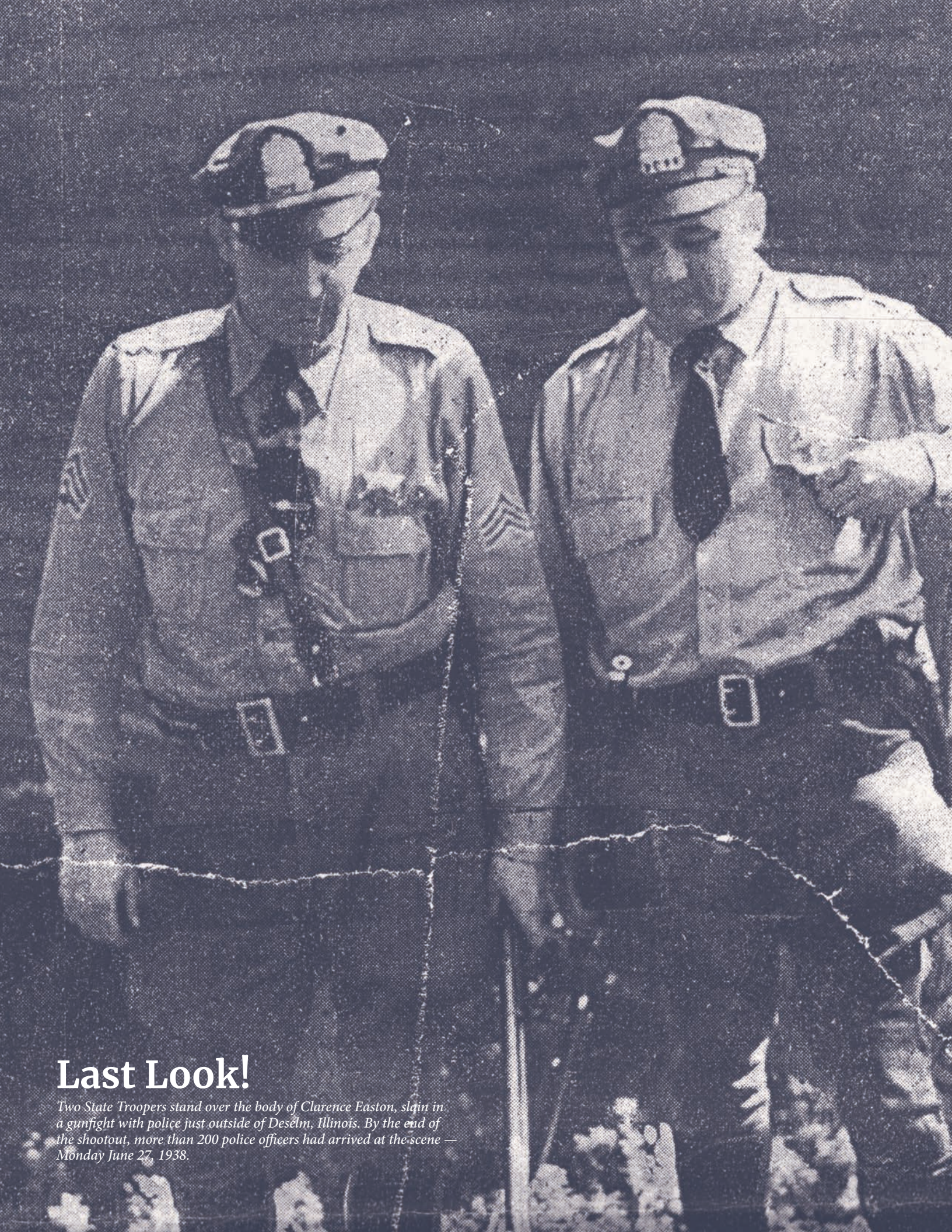
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## Last Look!

*Two State Troopers stand over the body of Clarence Easton, slain in a gunfight with police just outside of Deserim, Illinois. By the end of the shootout, more than 200 police officers had arrived at the scene — Monday June 27, 1938.*