

Top Story of The Edwardsville Intelligencer from 1964

Fifty years have passed but the vicious murder of two brothers by a Hamel, Illinois, bank robber remains a mystery.

On Oct. 9, 1964, brothers Perley Frank, 26, and Denver Lee Litton, 22, were murdered in dense woods by a robber, who was fleeing from police from a Hamel bank with a sack full of money.

The story of the grisly murders of the two brothers appeared in newspapers across the country and remains the most bizarre murder case in the annals of crime in Madison County.

Fifty years ago on the October day just before noon, a man dressed like a farmer in a Burlington brand denim bib overalls and a jacket with a flannel shirt, leather cap and ear flaps drove into Hamel, a small farming community.

Most bank employees and townspeople were eating lunch and didn't notice the robber who drove up to the bank on Illinois Route 140 in a dirty, black 1951 Ford. He pulled a ski mask over his face and pointed a gun at two tellers and demanded, "Give me all the money." A teller handed \$6,400 to a robber, who sped away on Illinois Route 140. After the robbery, Illinois State Police set up roadblocks, but the robber disappeared in deep woods down a logging trail where he encountered the Litton brothers cutting logs. He tied their hands and feet and strangled them with strips of bed sheets with their necks tied to two small tree saplings.

After dark, William Litton, the father of the two brothers, drove down the logging trail looking for his two sons. In the glow of his headlights he saw his sons hanging from the tree.

"The nightmares of seeing my two sons murdered will haunt me forever, the father told Ande Yakstis," retired Telegraph reporter that night.

Madison County Sheriff Robert Hertz said the murder is still an active case in the sheriff's department file.

"Sometimes someone realizes they have to get this off their chest and come forward and talk about it," Hertz said.

Sheriff's deputies and FBI have interviewed hundreds of people and followed dozens of leads in last several years but never made an arrest.



Article from Alton Telegraph 1964

Yakstis arrived on the scene with a photographer shortly after the bodies were found. He describes the murder as “the most horrible scene I ever witnessed.”

A few days later Yakstis was alongside the sheriff’s deputies and a state trooper who discovered the bank robber’s clothes in a shallow spot under a fallen tree.”

The retired reporter saw a pair of dungaree pants, hat, coat and mask neatly folded under the fallen tree. Hair clippings were in the cap showing the robber had apparently got a haircut before the robbery.

Investigators concluded that the bank robber was dressed in common country attire, much the way farmers in the Hamel region dressed at the time. William Litton, the boys’ father, believed the robber killed his sons because they saw him without his mask and he knew they could identify them.

Sheriff’s deputies noticed that the ski mask was sewn tightly with thread around the nose so that none of the skin of his face was exposed. Because of this, deputies believed he was someone local as the ski mask was sewn tight so no one could identify him.

“He took pain to disguise himself,” one deputy said.

Yakstis said the bank robbery and murders on that quiet lunch hour Oct. 9, 1964, suddenly put little Hamel on the national map. FBI agents also believe that the robber was a local man because he knew how to find a logging trail in the woods just off Illinois Route 4, four miles from the bank.

Investigators discovered that the robber apparently sat on a tree stump with a ball of twine and pocketknife and cut little strips of bed sheets to bundle the money. Suddenly the Litton brothers drove down the logging trail and saw the robber’s face.

About a month after the bank robbery, Yakstis and another reporter were walking down in he woods near where the crime occurred and found an abandoned pickup truck with no license plates. The driver of the pickup had struck a log and then abandoned the vehicle. The FBI discovered the truck came from Kansas City, Mo., and believed it could have some connection to the robbery. The FBI couldn’t find any fingerprints on the truck, Yakstis said.

Hertz expressed pride that in his 12 years as sheriff, there has never been a murder with his investigators that remain unsolved. Fifty years later, Hertz wants to solve the murder of the Litton brothers.



Current site of the First National Bank in Hamel

If anyone has information about the Littonbrothers' homicide, contact the Madison County Sheriff's Department Anonymous Tips Line at (618) 296-3000 or contact Sheriff Hertz personally at his office at (618) 692-4433.

"The clock is ticking on being able to solve this case," Hertz said. "If the suspects were in their 20s at the time of the robbery and homicide, they would now be in their 70s. It is entirely possible the responsible party or parties is not living. It is still possible someone with information is still alive."