

The Tragedy of the Moores

Contributed by Member Michelle Smith

It's just a tiny hamlet set back from the highway in southwestern Iowa, yet people from all across the nation make the trek to visit. It's a small town which seems to shut down after 5 p.m., yet Villisca's story once knocked the Titanic tragedy off of the national front page news.

Villisca was a town where everyone knew everyone. Attending church was the social norm, doors stayed unlocked and violent crimes weren't even considered a remote possibility... that is, not until the tenth day of June in 1912.

As the rest of the town began to stir early in the morning, a neighbor noted that the Moore family home still remained strangely still and silent – an odd contrast to the normal everyday bustling of the home which consisted of 4 children and 2 adults. After a couple of contacts were made, the sheriff arrived to investigate, not knowing that what he found within those walls would change the town forever.

The first bodies to be discovered were those of Lena and Ina Stillinger, who were friends of the Moore children and had been sleeping downstairs in the sewing room. The Moore family was discovered upstairs lying in their beds. The Stillinger girls, along with the Moore parents Josiah and Sarah, and the children Herman, Katherine, Boyd and Paul had all been violently murdered in their sleep.

Investigators determined that all of the victims had been attacked with a blunt instrument, with the exception of Sarah, upon whom the sharp end of the axe had been used. The killers had continued to strike the bodies, even after death until their faces had become completely obliterated.

A bloody axe had been left in the room where the Stillinger sisters stayed. All the curtains had been drawn and the bodies were found with the heads covered by bedclothes. All the mirrors in the house had also been covered with sheets. Some believe that this practice may have had to do with a legend in which people believed that when the soul leaves the body that it can escape and become trapped in a mirror if not covered.

Unfortunately, the crime remains unsolved to this day. Before an official investigation could take place, members of the neighborhood were allowed to wander all about the house, looking at and touching things, including the murder weapon. With so much handling at the scene and the rudimentary level of crime investigation abilities at the time, it would have been nearly impossible to identify the guilty party.

As you might imagine, a home with a history as shocking and violent as this has produced many supernatural accounts. A young couple who inhabited the house in the

1930s heard noise and witnessed the figure of a man standing at the end of the bed, holding an axe.

Other stories include accounts of the front porch door opening on its own, sounds of children crying in the middle of the night and clothes being thrown around. One former resident claimed that his pocketknife had been pulled from his hand and came back to stab him in the palm.

The house is currently owned by Darwin Linn, a long-time citizen of Villisca. Linn currently gives tours of the home and is kind enough to spend extra time answering any questions which visitors may have. He is truly a sincere and gracious host. Daytime, lamp lit, and overnight tours are available. All information can be found at the official website: <http://www.villiscaiowa.com/index.html>

Some interesting EVP's taped at the Villisca site:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7Wh-ILRhmg>

A news piece, including EVP's and a door shutting:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2SyQEONut4>

All information courtesy of Darwin Linn and The Official Site of the Villisca Axe Murders: <http://www.villiscaiowa.com/index.html>

The Moore House:



The Moore Graves:

