

# John Tilly Cooper

John Tilly Cooper was born about 1837 in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> He was one of ten children of John and Ellen Cooper. He studied medicine at Dublin College. He immigrated to America and lived in New York.<sup>2</sup> He was made a naturalized citizen on 10 November 1873 in Salt Lake, Utah Territory.<sup>3</sup> He became an assistant surgeon in the US Army at Fort Cameron, near Beaver, Utah Territory.<sup>4</sup> The next year, he opened a doctor's office at Silver Reef, Washington, Utah Territory.<sup>5</sup> He married Adelina Meeks about 1878 in Utah Territory. They had three children, all born in Silver Reef.<sup>6</sup>

In 1878, John found a frog encased in silver ore about twenty feet below the surface of the Tecumseh Mine on the north end of Buckeye Reef. He peeled off the silver and found the animal to be mummified. Similar findings included a lizard, toad, trees and branches, all covered in silver.<sup>7</sup> That same year, a letter from Dr. Junius Terry at Silver Reef to Dr. Hodgen at St Louis was published in a medical journal. It described an operation, assisted by Dr. Cooper and Mr. Wagner, to remove a piece of leather string from the bladder and privates of a 45-year old man.<sup>8</sup>

In 1879, Lewis Wilson took John to court, alleging that he had yanked out two perfectly sound molars instead of the infected one. Wilson asked \$299 in damages. John was a practicing physician and surgeon at Silver Reef and felt possessed of the requisite skill for extraction of human teeth.<sup>9</sup> That same year, John and Julius Wagner patented a tap for tin cans that allowed them to be resealed after opening.<sup>10</sup>

On the 1880 census, John was a physician, living with his wife and son in Silver Reef, Washington, Utah Territory.<sup>11</sup> In 1881, John and Adelina's only son was found in convulsions and died. He had been a fine, healthy fellow nearly two years old. Indications seemed to be poison but what, how or where was a mystery.<sup>12</sup> The next year, a young teenager was accidentally shot as he retrieved his gun from his wagon while on his way home to Pine Valley. Dr. Cooper of Silver Reef was summoned and found that the shot passed through his left lung and lodged under the shoulder blade. The young man died three days later.<sup>13</sup>

John posted an ad in the Silver Reef Miner for a lost black Newfoundland pup. He offered \$5 for its return, and \$25 for the conviction of the thief if it had been stolen.<sup>14</sup> At some point, John moved to Butte, Montana.<sup>15</sup> In 1884, the family moved to Salt Lake City, where John had an office upstairs in the Palace Hotel. His office hours were 8-11 am and 2-5 pm, which free consultations between 8-10.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> History of the City of Spokane and Spokane County, Washington, by Nelson Wayne Durham, Vol 3, p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> Utah Naturalization and Citizenship Records, 1858-1959.

<sup>4</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, 9 July 1884, p. 8; 10 July 1884, p. 5; 26 November 1884, p. 1. The fort was open from 1872-1883.

<sup>5</sup> History of the City of Spokane and Spokane County, Washington, by Nelson Wayne Durham, Vol 3, p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> *Familysearch.org*

<sup>7</sup> *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 September 1878, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *St Louis Medical and Surgical Journal*, 1879, Vol 36, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> *Reno Gazette-Journal*, 15 October 1879, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Improvement in taps for tine cans, US 221285A at [google.ch/patents](http://google.ch/patents)

<sup>11</sup> United States Census, 1880.

<sup>12</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, 6 March 1881, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, 4 February 1882, p. 4; 5 February 1882, p. 16.

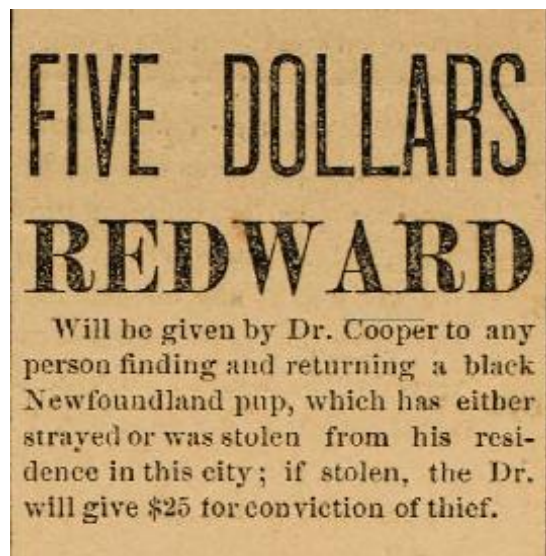
<sup>14</sup> *Silver Reef Miner*, 30 September 1882, p. 2; 28 October 1882, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> History of the City of Spokane and Spokane County, Washington, by Nelson Wayne Durham, Vol 3, p. 113.

He had an excellent reputation and stood well in his profession.<sup>16</sup> The mining excitement at Murray, Idaho, attracted him into prospecting and mining about 1885. He and Origin O Peck grubstaked a prospector named Noah S Kellogg. John and Origin were two of the original owners of the famous Bunker Hill and Sullivan mine. This mine was sold in May 1887 for \$1,500,000. After several court cases, John and Origin received \$76,000 for their shares.<sup>17</sup>

The family moved to Spokane, Spokane, Washington, where John died in June 1889. He was buried at Fairmount Memorial Park.<sup>18</sup> He was always faithful to high and honorable principles. He was a member of the Episcopal Church and the Ancient Order of United Workmen. He was a Democrat but did not care for public office. He loved camping and outdoor sports, was a great traveler and had a fondness for nature and children.<sup>19</sup>

Adelina lived with her daughter and then her sister in Spokane until her death in 1938.<sup>20</sup> She was also buried in Fairmount Memorial Park.<sup>21</sup>



(Image from the *Silver Reef Miner*, 30 September 1882, p. 2; 28 October 1882, p. 2)



(Image from the *Salt Lake Herald*, 13 December 1884, p. 1)

<sup>16</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, 2 December 1884, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> History of the City of Spokane and Spokane County, Washington, by Nelson Wayne Durham, Vol 3, p. 113; Bunker Hill Mining Company records, 1887-1984; The Bunker Hill Enterprise, by Thomas Arthur Rickard, 1921, pp. 111-117.

<sup>18</sup> *Findagrave.com*

<sup>19</sup> History of the City of Spokane and Spokane County, Washington, by Nelson Wayne Durham, Vol 3, p. 113.

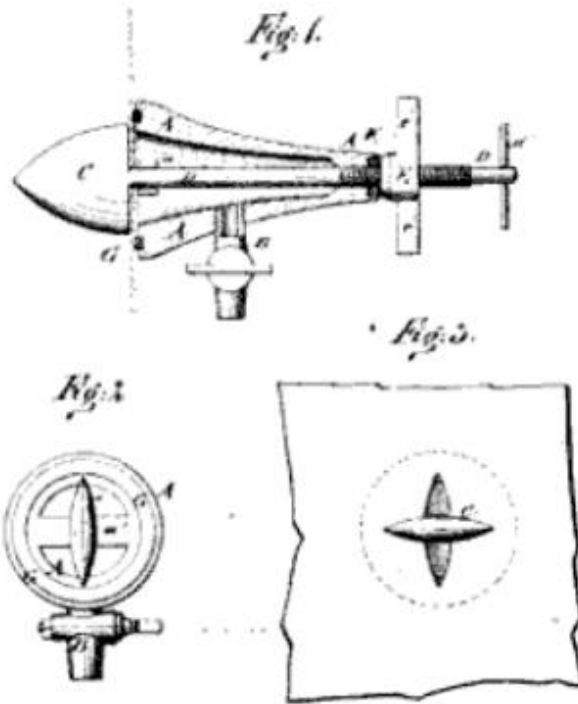
<sup>20</sup> United States Census, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930; US City Directories, 1822-1995.

<sup>21</sup> *Findagrave.com*

J. T. COOPER & J. WAGNER.  
Tap for Tin-Cans, &c.

No. 221,285.

Patented Nov. 4, 1879.



WITNESSES:  
*Clara A. ...*  
*...*

INVENTOR:  
*J. T. Cooper*  
*J. Wagner*  
BY *...*  
ATTORNEYS

Original 1879 patent drawing for a tap for tin cans (image from Specifications and Drawings of Patents Issued from the US Patent Office, 1879, p. 159)



(Image from *Findagrave.com*)