

The Mysterious Case of the Dry-gulched Uranium Prospector
Presentation by Loren Webb

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. . . came out totally innocently. Back in 1986, myself, my family, and another family went up into the mountains above Veyo. We just went for a camping trip. And we had about an hour or so of daylight left, so we drove up—most of the time if you get to a camping site you like to look around and see what’s out around, at least maybe a mile around you. We drove up the road, and we stumbled onto this huge junk yard. We couldn’t figure out what it was. I thought, wow, this is really interesting. And then I never thought anything of it for another two years.

And then in 1988 I was visiting with [local historian] Bart Anderson, and I asked Bart, I said, “There’s a big junk yard up in the middle of Dixie National Forest. What is that?” And he said, “There’s some real intrigue involved with that place.” And he went into some more detail that I’m not going to go into, but it got my interest. And for some reason I’ve never stopped searching. This is a difficult subject to talk about because it involved families. And I look at the innocent parties on both sides of this tragedy, and it’s difficult. Anyway, with that I will get started. I wanted to have Bart Anderson come up and help me with the—[inaudible instructions to Bart.]

Room 20 in the Kanab Hotel was Leroy Wilson’s room. He rented it by the month while prospecting for uranium in the spring of 1954. The uranium boom had hit the county, and nearly everyone was hopeful of finding a hot rock and making it rich. A number of strangers were filing claims at the courthouse, and according to Doc Aiken, among them were a few rough characters, ones you would not want to get acquainted with. Among those rough characters he listed were Leroy Wilson and Tom Holland. Holland lived in a trailer behind the Purple Sage Motel run by Lawrence Zirker and his wife, Ilene. There were also Ellis Gripes and Leland Rasmussen, associates of Wilson. “While they didn’t seem friendly to each other, it was said they all came from Bull Valley near Veyo, a small town northwest of St. George,” Aiken said, except Holland; he was from Beryl in Iron County.

At the Kanab Hotel, Gripes said Wilson was his alarm clock. “Every morning at 6 on the dot, his door would slam, then the bathroom door. Then the toilet seat would bang down. Leroy made enough racket in the bathroom I didn’t need no alarm clock,” Gripes remembered. But on the day he went out with Tom Holland, Leroy hadn’t gotten in by the time Ellis went to bed. This is Leroy again. Then late that night Ellis said he heard the key in his door and figured Wilson was back. But the next morning Gripes didn’t wake up until almost 7. “Leroy hadn’t been my alarm clock, so I peeked into his room to see if he was sick. The bed hadn’t been used, and his briefcase with all his papers was gone. Somebody’s come in and stole it. So it was me who started the search for him,” Ellis said.

So where was Wilson on May 18, 1954?

Aiken said some of the local stockmen were upset with prospectors trespassing on their property, so when Orval Robinson saw a car parked at the side of the road near his ranch on May 18, he stopped and checked the registration certificate in the vehicle. It belonged to Tom Holland. Orval looked around and saw two sets of footprints leading away from the car. Two men had apparently climbed through the fence north toward a rough break in the hills. It was about 4 p.m. Orval went on to his ranch, and when he drove back, on his way to pick up his wife at the City offices, where she was the City Clerk, the car was gone. That was about 5 p.m.

The next day Orval stopped again on his way to the ranch to look around. The two sets of prints he had seen the day before were still clearly visible in the soft sand. But in checking further, he found only one set of footprints led back to the car. He said that was strange. He followed the two sets of footprints that led to the head of a wash. One set of prints had gone into the wash, while the other set circled it. As he stood, wondering which set of prints to follow, he suddenly froze: In the wash was a dead man and a Geiger counter, still clicking, where the victim had dropped it when he was shot. The man had been shot five times with a .45 caliber pistol. The killer then returned to the car, using a different route. Empty shells from the automatic lay in the wash. The body was that of Leroy Wilson.

On the day Wilson was shot, 1,300 claims had been filed on lands in the surrounding desert and mountains. According to a *Time* magazine article, Wilson was the first man to be dry-gulched, as prospectors in the old west so frequently died, in the twentieth century rush for the new glamour metal—uranium.

Wilson, [age] 62, was, and I am quoting here from *Time* magazine, a brawler, an inventor, a Mormon excommunicated for defending polygamy, and the leader of a strange band of men and women. Wilson was no run-of-the-desert prospector. He was something of a legendary figure, 6 feet, 3 inches, 240 pounds, loud-mouthed, belligerent, and shrewd, according to the *Time* magazine article. His past included periods as a salesman of insurance, stocks and bonds; and for a time he was a manufacturer in Salt Lake City of water heaters. He had hundreds of patents to his name.

Between 1928 and 1931, he filed mining claims in what became known as “General Steam” in the mountains above Veyo, a tiny farming settlement 100 northwest of Kanab. While outsiders knew little about what went on at General Steam, they knew Wilson was absolute ruler of the Bull Valley settlement.

When Wilson’s group heard of Kanab’s uranium strike, he and his followers left their mountain settlement to take hotel rooms in Kanab. Wilson had prospected the Kanab area before and filed claims. Other prospectors assumed he planned to develop his property. Instead, Wilson went after more claims. He was purportedly a college graduate with a good knowledge of mining laws. According to the *Time* article, he bluffed some prospectors out of their claims—simply jumped the claims of others who refused to deal with him.

For eight months before his death, Wilson had on-and-off-again dealings with Tom Holland (and this is still Leroy), a 6 foot and 200 pound farmer from Beryl, 150 miles northwest of Kanab. This is a direct quote: “Holland, who is as jovial as Wilson was bellicose,” according

to the *Time* magazine, “came to Kanab in a house trailer, with some vague agreement to work on Wilson’s claims. The partners fought, made up, fought again.

One day last week Holland and Wilson were observed in town, apparently in a rare mood of good fellowship. They set off to inspect new claims, returned that night, and made plans to meet the next day. Before they met, a stranger had appeared at the Kane County Recorder’s office to report a find of uranium. In one hand he held a chunk of ore, in the other, a Geiger counter. The rock seemed to be super rich with uranium. One prospector who saw it said, “It made that there Jagger counter go nuts!” The stranger excitedly told the recorder there he had found the rock in a seldom-visited foothill west of town, the opposite direction from the February strike. He filed his claim for the usual 20 acres. On the street that day, he met Wilson, told him of the discovery, and then disappeared. A few days later, investigation revealed the stranger was an Arizona uranium miner who had staged his performance as a practical joke.

But Leroy Wilson took it seriously. He and Holland set out for the area of the new find in Holland’s car. They’d wanted to explore the area west of town but had had difficulty finding a way across the wash at Kanab Creek. They’d stopped twice to inquire about routes, then had taken the road leading west of the airport. They’d left the car a few miles farther on to hike into the hills. And Orval Robinson, a local rancher who’d checked the registration slip on the steering wheel, according to authors Sam and Raymond Taylor, had identified the car.

Two sets of footprints led through the desert dust from the car into the hills. The tracks showed that Leroy Wilson was a few steps ahead when he was gunned down from behind. As he fell with the Geiger counter clicking in one hand and the hunk of hot ore in the other, the killer kept pumping bullets into him. Five empty shells were found from an automatic pistol of the type Holland was known to have been toting. The killer did not advance to examine the body, but turned and walked over a hill, then back to the location of the car, according to Raymond Taylor. Orval notified Merrill Johnson of the Utah Highway Patrol and Kane County Sheriff Mason Meeks who investigated the killing.

When Doctor George Aiken examined the body at the site of the murder, west of what is now known as Kanab Creek Ranchos, he observed a bloody froth from his mouth, so he concluded Wilson had been shot in the back first, and that the other four shots had been fired as he lay dying. There was little blood from the later shots. “We removed a slug from under his skin, and it matched the empty shells near the body, at the scene of the murder, shells from a .45 caliber automatic,” Aiken said. The sheriff made plaster casts of the footprints.

On the basis of the evidence, Tom Holland, 49, was arrested at his farm in Beryl the next day by Iron County Sheriff Arthur Nelson and Deputies Charles Wells and Arch Benson.

Lawrence Zurker, who ran the Purple Sage Motel, also became a prime suspect when it was revealed he and Wilson had a fist fight over a uranium claim, and Zurker had subsequently asked the sheriff for a permit to carry a gun, Doc Aiken said.

To authors Sam and Raymond Taylor, the case was open and shut. Talk on the plateau wasn’t a question of guilt, but the severity of the penalty. Prosecutors would never convict

Holland of first-degree murder, people said, because after all, the feeling among many, according to the Taylors, is that Leroy Wilson had it coming.

In southern Utah, the Mormons had a long tradition of settling their own affairs. They stayed out of court and had little to do with lawyers. Holland wasn't a Mormon, but he'd saved them the trouble of taking care of Leroy. The Taylors wrote that they heard talk about a fund being raised for Holland's defense, sort of a reward for a job well done.

Meanwhile, funeral services for Wilson were quietly held in Midvale at a funeral home. At the last minute, LDS officials had turned down a request by the family to hold the funeral in an LDS chapel. Wilson was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.

Back in southern Utah, murder charges were filed against Holland in Kanab on May 21, 1954. Holland was arraigned before Kanab Precinct Judge A. P. Wakeling where Holland asked time to seek legal counsel. A three-man coroner's jury, which held an inquest at the site where Wilson's body was found, ruled Wilson's death was a murder. Sixth District Attorney Sterling Bossard of Richfield and Kane County Attorney Willard Mackelprang of Kanab conducted the inquest. But Kane County was not prepared to handle a murder trial, according to Doc Aiken. The County Attorney was not even an attorney, and the sheriff was a rancher and a cowhand. There was no professional investigation to gather evidence and organize a prosecution.

A preliminary hearing previously scheduled in Kanab before Judge Wakeling was transferred to Justice of the Peace Edward Carroll in Orderville, because Wakeling said he had a weak heart and would prefer not to hear the case, according to a *Deseret News* article. At the beginning of that hearing, Holland, now represented by Defense Attorney Ellis Pickett of St. George, declared he was not guilty of murder. The plea is unusual in Utah legal practice, since pleas on felonies usually wait until arraignment in District Court. The hearing was held in a valley schoolroom. It was the first murder case in Orderville in about 40 years, the *Deseret News* reported.

There was standing room only in the tiny domestic science room of the school basement for 35 spectators. A white electric refrigerator stood directly behind the presiding justice, and blackboards lined the wall. Holland did not testify at the hearing, however. He had earlier told authorities that when he and Wilson went to check out the area on the morning of May 18, they were unable to reach the site because the road was washed out in one section, so Holland started to leave town by another route. Wilson, according to Holland, said he could get to the area faster by walking, so he got out of the car at the edge of town and started walking. That was about 2:30 p.m., according to Holland, who said he went back to town and never saw Wilson again.

Orval Robinson testified he saw Holland's car parked on a road about a mile and a half from where Wilson's body was found. "It was a blue four-door Plymouth, about a 1948 model. I drove to the car and looked on the steering post for the registration certificate. The name on the certificate was Cyril T. Holland," Robinson testified.

When Sheriff Meeks testified, he was asked, "What condition was Mr. Wilson in when you found him?"

"Bad," the Sheriff replied.

“Alive?”

“No, dead.”

Carroll then bound Holland over to District Court to face a first-degree murder charge for the alleged slaying of uranium-hunting partner Leroy Albert Wilson.

Pickett, a former Washington County District Attorney, stressed the time element in all of his cross-examination at the preliminary hearing, indicating he might have a time alibi for his client when his client’s case goes to trial in Sixth District Court in Kanab. Holland was returned to jail in Cedar City after the hearing.

During the interim, Wilson associate Willis Leland Rasmussen took issue with a *Time* magazine article about the murder case. In a June issue of the *Kane County Standard* newspaper, he said the magazine libeled the character and reputation of Wilson. The magazine, Rasmussen claimed, by depicting Holland as a “jolly farmer” and “jovial” set the “type for the nation’s press, preparing public opinion to accept the acquittal of a cold-blooded criminal.”

Rasmussen stated that he had been closely associated with Wilson for 20 years and knew of his enterprises, his capabilities, and his genius. Rasmussen said he told a magazine official about that, but the official ignored it. “He preferred to dig deep into the slimy gutter to bring up muck to smear the great man’s character, and so carry the torch for the liberation of the murderer,” Rasmussen wrote. “Mr. Wilson was not an outsider, as you state. He has owned property in Kane County for no less than 14 years and has made that county his place of residence for a portion of every one of those years. His visits have been frequent, and a great many residents are his life-long friends.” He was not a brawler, Rasmussen said. Such language is libelous to the extreme, calculated to give the impression of a low-down, disorderly, drunken, repulsive personality. Mr. Wilson was never in all his life anything of the kind. He possessed decided opinions, and if occasion called, he never hesitated to express the same. I have never known him to engage in anything that could possibly be called a common quarrel, and certainly never a brawl.

Where the magazine referred to Wilson as leader of a “strange band” of people, Rasmussen asked if the magazine so labeled all pioneers of new mines, new inventions, and creators of new industries and wealth. “Do you think it so “strange” that there are a few people left in this West of ours, courageous enough to launch out upon a new enterprise and refuse to quit short of the attainment of success? Why do you wish to insult such people?” Rasmussen wrote.

He also noted the magazine exaggerated Wilson’s height by four inches and his weight by 25 pounds. Instead of using the word “belligerent,” Rasmussen said, the word “aggressive” was more appropriate for Wilson. He also challenged the magazine’s assertion that Wilson was a “claim jumper” and a “bluffer.” “I challenge you to prove a single case where he took over any other man’s claims by either of those methods. On the contrary, I can show you wherein your ‘jolly, jovial’ murder suspect facilitated the jumping of several of Wilson’s claims by one intimate comrade named Zirker, et al. I can also show you that when there appeared to be a conflict in mining claims, Wilson withdrew his claim or offered to give a quit-claim to the other

party. Why wouldn't a man who has been the only active mining man in one particular district for 14 years have the lion's share of the best ground? And when a 'gold rush' hits the region, why shouldn't he find it advisable to go and protect his ground," Rasmussen wrote. He also maintained that Holland only stayed in a house trailer a few nights in Kanab, and that during a postmaster's convention, he had lodged at the Zirker's Purple Sage Motel. He lived very intimately, it seems, with that "claim jumper,"

Holland was never a partner with Wilson, Rasmussen argued, nor have they ever "fought and made up and fought again." All Tom's pretended dealings with Mr. Wilson turned out to be "phonies." To entice the victim to a remote area and then fill him with lead in the back was an act of treachery and cowardice, Rasmussen said. "Civilization suffers the loss of a great genius and a great man. You make that loss even greater by destroying his influence. Time will yet demonstrate the rightness of Leroy A. Wilson," he wrote.

On Tuesday, August 3, Holland was arraigned before Sixth District Judge John Sevy and entered a not guilty plea. Jury trial was set for August 16 in the Kane County Courthouse in Kanab. On that date, the tedious job of selecting jurors began. Some 60 potential jurors showed up. Meanwhile, spectators—mostly shirt-sleeved ranchers, milled about the halls and grounds of the courthouse, the *Deseret News* reported. In the first round, the number of jurors was reduced to 32. Sevy said it might take a week to ten days to select a jury because of the wide acquaintance of the defendant and the murder victim to people in the area. Holland, described by the paper as a "scholarly looking defendant," appeared in court wearing a brightly flowered sport shirt.

While selection of the jury was underway, the mystery of what happened to Wilson's briefcase came to the forefront. Wilson, according to a newspaper account, had been filing mineral claims in this area for some years prior to his death. Some say he had as many as 1,500 filings. The record of all these holdings in which scores of local people had "joint interests" was contained in a bulging brown briefcase he always kept with him. It has not been seen since his death. [Unclear comment from the audience.] (That was Leland Rasmussen. He was an associate of Leroy Wilson, and that appeared in the *Kane County Standard* newspaper at the time in Kanab.)

The newspaper also reported a rumor that the portfolio contained a formula for a new process of uranium ore handling which Wilson had developed at his secret laboratory located at General Steam near Veyo. Reportedly a graduate engineer, Wilson had invented and patented several mining devices and processes.

Meanwhile, Judge Sevy ordered nine additional jury candidates summoned to court. Strangely, it was not acquaintance or relationship with the local and district attorneys in the case which threatened to disqualify a number of jurors, according to *Deseret News* reporter Ted Cannon, as much as a connection of Assistant Attorney General Ken Chamberlain of Salt Lake, who had come to help with the prosecution. It "seems Ken is originally from Orderville, and he's got kinfolk all over the County."

Meanwhile, defense attorney Ellis Pickett finds his role reversed. Twenty years ago prior to 1952 he was Fifth District Attorney and Prosecutor in St. George. Now he's representing the

defendant. An additional twist is that Pickett prosecuted Wilson, the man whom his present client is accused of killing. Wilson, inventor, prospector, and leader of a “family community in Bull Valley at that time was accused of taking a gun to a U.S. geological survey man who was doing some checking up on his property, Cannon reported. “Both the accused and the slain were well known to nearly everybody in the area, and there seems to be few who don’t have their minds made up,” Cannon stated in the same *Deseret News* column. Cannon also noted that an unofficial check found that half of Kanab’s male population wears cowboy boots, but during a 24-hour period “we failed to find a single horse. They must be nearby though—the Kanab Equitable features buggy whips in the window--\$3 a piece.”

By August 18, the *Deseret News* reported the court had run out of prospective jurors, and Sheriff Meeks had been dispatched to comb the county for tax-paying citizens over the age of 21 who were of sound mind and limb. By that date, a total of 89 had been summoned, yet it still remained doubtful a final jury of 12 could be agreed upon before the end of the week.

Holland, who has maintained his innocence, appears cheerful and confident as he enters the courtroom each morning accompanied by his wife and his counsel. In the courtroom also are his brothers, sister, and sister-in-law, and a son, Carl, 16, who had been looking after the Holland ranch in Beryl in western Iron County since his father’s arrest. Another son, Carroll Thomas Holland, 18, is engaged in secret electronic work for the Navy at Treasure Island, California.

While preliminaries of the trial moved slowly along, Kanab’s uranium boom also appeared to quiet down. One reason, the *Deseret News* reported, was because a cloud now rests over several hundred claims which Wilson held in southern Utah, the title to which will not be established until his estate is probated.

The state’s version of the mysterious case of the dry-gulched uranium prospector began to unfold Wednesday afternoon before a jury of four housewives, five farmer-stockmen, a carpenter, an electrician, and a motel operator.

To establish a motive for the murder of Leroy Wilson, the state tried unsuccessfully to introduce into evidence a check for \$3,000 allegedly written by Holland to Wilson. Aiken said Holland had bought some uranium claims from Wilson for that amount and had begun to promote the sale of those claims, when Holland’s check to Wilson bounced. Since he had already sold some of the stock, Holland was in a spot, and that was listed as a motive for the murder.

Defense attorney Ellis Pickett quickly objected to introducing that evidence, and Judge Sevy ruled in his favor. “There goes the D.A.’s case,” whispered Dixon Ross, another courtroom observer.

“What do you mean?” the Taylors asked.

“He’s now got no motive,” Ross replied.

Much of Thursday afternoon was spent with the jury excluded while legal counsel argued the admissibility of evidence submitted by Philo Allen of Kanab and Willis Leland Rasmussen of Veyo, Wilson’s associate. Allen, a local trucker and father of 14 children,

testified Wednesday he was with Wilson and Holland on the day of the murder from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. On that day, they were trying to find a way to cross Kanab Creek to an area where some “hot rock” had reportedly been found. Allen, according to a *Salt Lake Tribune* article, said Holland was driving his car all the while he was with them and that after driving north of Kanab and failing to find a road across the Kanab Creek Gorge, they returned to Kanab.

Allen testified that after stopping twice in Kanab where Wilson inquired about a road, they were told they could cross the wash on a road near Kanab Airport. Allen said Wilson and Holland, with Holland still driving, headed in the direction of the airport, when Allen last saw them together. Allen also recalled nipping at a whiskey bottle with Holland in the pool hall after their return to town (but before heading south of town).

On Thursday, state witnesses included Orville Robinson, Lee Rasmussen, Delmar Robinson, and Ronald Mace. Delmar Robinson, operator of a motel at the south edge of Kanab, told of seeing Holland and Wilson pass his place in Holland’s blue car about 4 p.m. on the afternoon of the killing. Ronald Mace, who was raking hay on his farm near the Arizona line, testified he saw the same car with two men approaching his field. He said Holland came over and asked him how to cross Kanab Creek. Pickett asked Mace how he fixed the time of the incident, since he didn’t have a watch.

Question: How do you know you ate lunch at noon if you didn’t have a watch?

Answer: I could tell by how much hay I had raked since noon, Mace replied.

Question: In other words, you tell the time by your appetite?

Answer: Yes, I do.

Orville Robinson testified when he saw the blue car parked on his land, he noticed it was registered to Holland, and he noticed a bottle of whiskey on the front seat and a suitcase on the back seat.

The State rested its case Friday afternoon, August 20. That day Sevy denied a defense motion for a directed verdict of not guilty. Pickett claimed in his motion the State failed to show any intent or put the defendant at the scene of the crime and that no weapon had been found or introduced into evidence.

On Friday, the *Deseret News* reported the prosecution’s last witness, Russell Cutler, a Kanab pool hall operator, testified that ten days before the killing, Holland told him at a tavern over the line in Arizona that Wilson “had two or three men to his credit.” He said Holland claimed that Wilson was “after him.” Then he said he asked Holland what he was going to do about it, and that Holland replied by raising up his shirt and indicating a pistol tucked in the top of his trousers. “I saw that it was a .45 automatic,” Cutler said, “and that was enough for me,” the *Deseret News* reported. The *Tribune* reported Cutler’s comments slightly different, noting that Cutler testified he did not know the caliber of the pistol but that “it was slightly smaller than a German Luger.”

Earlier, Sheriff Meeks had testified to finding Wilson's body, shells from a .45 automatic near the point where the killer is believed to have stood. On cross-examination, the sheriff produced plaster casts made of the footprints and admitted he had been unable to find any shoes belonging to Holland which matched them.

Another strange development in the sheriff's testimony was his admission that Lee Rasmussen, one of Wilson's associates, had asked the sheriff for a warrant for Holland's arrest before it was known in Kanab that Wilson had been murdered. Meeks also testified he overheard a conversation on May 24 between Holland and his wife during which Holland said, "Whoever was out there was out to get both of us." That statement was admitted into evidence and was the first to indicate, indirectly, that Holland was at the scene of the crime.

The state rested its case Friday afternoon.

During the trial, Raymond Taylor went to visit Lawrence R. Zirker, who spoke with a German accent that became pronounced when he got excited. "Everybody's saying that Tom Holland did it, but that Leroy deserved what he got," Taylor said. Zirker bristled. "No, no, no. Maybe el toro de los bisques got vat he had coming, But Tom Holland, he didn't kill him. That I know." Taylor was surprised. Zirker himself was a prime suspect. He'd had a fight with Wilson over the claim jumping and had gone to Sheriff Meeks for permission to carry a gun for self-protection.

If Holland was acquitted, Zirker could become the next suspect, and yet here he was, vehemently declaring that Tom Holland was innocent. "It's open and shut against Holland," Taylor said. "They never vill convict him," Zirker replied. "Why do you say that?" Taylor said. "Vait and see," Zirker said. Taylor tried another tack. "If Holland didn't, then who did?" But Zirker would only smile. Taylor got nothing more from him.

On Monday, August 23, the defense called Lawrence R. and Ilene Zirker, proprietors of the Purple Sage Motel. They testified that Holland was with them at the motel the afternoon of the killing and at the time the state contends Wilson was slain. They testified that Holland and Mr. Zirker had some drinks together and that later they and Holland, along with a female companion named Lela Bauer of Kanab, dined at the Parry Lodge. The foursome then spent the late evening at Dutch's tavern in Orderville where they danced until nearly midnight.

Was Tom Holland a mild-mannered, law-abiding model citizen or a drinking, gun-toting, bad-check writer, and ruthless killer? That was the choice presented the jury by conflicting evidence in the uranium murder trial also known as the Geiger counter murder after its seventh day.

Holland himself was the chief witness Monday and Tuesday, relating details of his dealings with Wilson, which, he said, started last September, the *Deseret News* reported. He said they had traveled extensively in quest of uranium claims and that they had never quarreled. He also explained the \$3,000 check he had given Wilson and which the state claimed had been returned by the bank marked "insufficient funds." This check, he said, was advance royalty payments on 12 uranium claims given to Wilson so he could start construction on a uranium ore

processing plant. It was understood, he said, that Wilson was not to cash the check until a certain amount of stock in Wilson's new company, El Toro Uranium Corp, had been sold.

Holland denied owning or having a pistol of any kind since he entered the Navy in 1943, although he admitted there was a .32 special rifle in the back of the car in which he and Wilson were riding on the day of the killing. Supporting Holland's alibi that he left Wilson about 3:30 or 4:00 p.m. and went to his trailer and had a nap were Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Zirker and their daughters, Vicki, 16, and Lily Page, 14.

Six neighbors of Holland's family in the Beryl area of western Iron County testified as character witnesses for the defendant.

The *Tribune* reported that Israel Allen, 16, and son of the previous week's state witness, Philo Allen, was called as a defense witness. Israel Allen, a boyfriend of Vicki Zirker, said he was at the Purple Sage Motel on the night of May 18 and that he saw Holland there about 6 p.m. and for some 15 or 20 minutes after that.

On Tuesday, the jurors were taken to the sage- and cedar-covered desert country southwest of Kanab to view the scene of the killing.

Each time the trial convened, the *Deseret News* observed the courtroom was packed, and by far the majority present were teenagers and younger. In fact, one of them said, the defense attorney said, "Anybody would think it was Tom Mix on trial instead of Tom Holland." Dale Peterson, about 11, countered, "Well, it's better'n going to school."

After eight days of trial, the jury began deliberating on Wednesday, August 25, at 12:35 p.m. The jury broke its deliberations three times—twice for meals, and at 6 p.m. the jury returned to ask the court what constitutes a "reasonable doubt" in first-degree murder cases. Sevy told the jurors they could return a verdict of guilty as charged, guilty of second-degree murder, or a verdict of acquittal. "Before you return a verdict of guilty of first degree murder, you must be satisfied that all the elements of premeditation, malice, and deliberation existed, he told the jury. The judge also told the jury that circumstantial evidence is legal and permissible in murder trials but that the state must establish guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Early Thursday morning, after 15 hours of deliberation, the jury reached a verdict in the May 18 murder of Leroy Albert Wilson. The scene was tense and dramatic. Kanab had been dark and silent for some hours—only a few streetlights burning and an occasional car passing through. The crowd that had hung around the courthouse all Wednesday evening, hashing over details of the case while they awaited news of a verdict, had gone home. The courthouse itself was dark except for the big jury room on the southwest corner upstairs. There the lights were blazing, and from the open windows, the raised voices of the deliberating jury occasionally carried to the sidewalk below, the *Deseret News* reported.

Tom Holland slept peacefully while 12 people were trying to decide whether he should live or die. About 2:05 a.m., jury foreman Birt Gardner opened the door and announced to the dozing deputy in the hall that they had reached a verdict. Within 15 minutes, Sheriff Mason Meeks had rounded up Sixth District Judge John L. Sevy and his clerk, state and defense attorneys, the county clerk, and the defendant, and court was in session, the paper reported. By

this time a dozen other persons had got wind that the jury had reached a decision, among them members of Holland's family, including his wife, who was at his side every minute of the 10-day trial.

There was a heavy, dead silence for a moment before the judge asked, "Have you arrived at a verdict?"

"Yes, your honor, we have," replied Foreman Gardner. An almost imperceptible smile crossed the judge's face as he took the verdict, glanced at it, and handed it to County Clerk D. M. Tietjen to read aloud.

As the clerk intoned the words, "not guilty," Mrs. Holland threw herself in her smiling husband's arms and sobbed in relief. Their son Carl, 16, his face wreathed in smiles, bounded to his father's side, and other relatives and friends crowded around, the newspaper reported. All of them, along with Defense Attorney Ellis J. Pickett and Sixth District Attorney Sterling Bossard shook the jurors' hands as they filed out of the courtroom after being discharged by Judge Sevy.

The Hollands took off early Thursday morning for their ranch home in Beryl Junction in western Iron County where, as Mrs. Holland said, "There's a whole summer's farm work to be caught up on."

Following the verdict, Holland told reporters, "First thing I'll do is to help put up the hay crop and work off a little of this fat." He was at the Purple Sage Motel surrounded by family and friends, celebrating the occasion with a buffet supper of cold meat, salad, rolls, and a beverage. Holland, according to the *Deseret News*, looked like he could use some outdoor exercise, too. His 101 days of jail confinement left him soft and pudgy looking with a definite "prison pallor" which contrasts sharply with the tan of other residents of this sun-drenched area, the paper reported. "I've put on 12 pounds in jail," Holland said, "but I'll soon get rid of that." "At times during this thing, I've been worried, sure," Holland said, "but generally I was pretty confident it would work out all right. They just don't kill an innocent man." "Just like I told Mason (Sheriff Mason Meeks) when he arrested me, I said, 'Mason, you've got a fast horse and a long loop, but here's one maverick you're not going to put your brand on.'"

When asked if he would continue to farm or mine, Holland said he hoped to "pick up all the loose ends of my life just where I dropped them. I've got a lot of farm work to do, but we've got some valuable mining stuff, too."

One of the first things Mrs. Holland did was call her oldest son, Carroll T. Holland, now serving in the Navy in communications work at Treasure Island, California. "He'll be as thrilled as we are," she said. "You know, he wanted to come for this, but the Navy wouldn't let him. He's a good boy, though, and he knew it would come out all right." Carroll, she said, had been a 4-H club leader and representative at Boys State before entering the service. "We've got a wonderful family and some wonderful friends, but the one we rely on, the one that's never let us down and never will, is the one up there," she said, glancing upward. Tom's eyes filled with tears as he put his arm around her and said, "That's right, hon."

The *Salt Lake Tribune* also quoted Holland as saying, "I have no complaints or bitterness toward anyone. I have been treated fairly both before and during the trial. Those 101 days were

long ones, though. They took everything I had—my shoes, my guns and everything else—but it didn't fit.”

On August 26, 1954, *The Kane County Standard* asked, “Who committed cold-blooded murder?” With Holland's acquittal, the weekly newspaper said it opens the door for a complete investigation of the crime, which remains unsolved.

The *Washington County News* subsequently reported that over 200 well wishers of the Cyril T. Holland family gathered on the lawn of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Moyle on Saturday, August 28, 1954, in Beryl, to welcome their friend and neighbor back home after a three-months absence. Friends came from Enterprise, Cedar City, St. George, and Kanab. “An air of jubilation pervaded the air as a potluck dinner, including fried chicken with all the accompaniment was served to the over 200 guests,” the *Washington County News* reported. “Happiest of all was Tom himself from whom the black cloud seems to have been lifted. For his wife Gladys and son Carl, also, a great weight has lifted. Tom, who became a victim of circumstance and spent a resulting 101 days in close confinement, showed a great calmness and patience throughout the whole ordeal, including his 10-day trial. This was no doubt explained when during the stress of the last few days he remarked to his friends, “Why don't we quit worrying and leave it to the man upstairs,” the *Washington County News* reported.

Meanwhile, Wilson family members mourned the loss of Wilson to his family, friends, and the world. “He wouldn't go the way of the money world. He was his own person,” said his oldest daughter, Margaret, in a tribute that she wrote to him in 1954.

On the day of Holland's acquittal, Raymond Taylor went back to the Kanab Hotel where he undressed and got into what was once Wilson's bed in Room 20 to lie awake wondering who had killed Leroy Wilson. When he checked out the next day, he asked Ellis Gripe for the bill. “No charge, Taylor,” Ellis Gripe said. “Leroy had number 20 paid in advance. I know he'd want you to be his guest.”

Thank you.

Footnote: In the April 13, 2011, issue of the *Southern Utah News* in Kanab, Utah, Editor Dixie Brunner wrote a new account about the Geiger Counter Murder that says law enforcement had the right man - Tom Holland - after all. She reported that Larry Zirker, who lived in Kanab as a child, said suspect Cyril "Tom" Holland confided in Zirker's father, Lawrence Zirker, after the trial. Holland said he used a bogus uranium find as a lure, then murdered Leroy Albert Wilson when he arrived to make a claim. Zirker, 64, wrote his account in a letter to the *Southern Utah News*, which published it on April 11, 2011. In a telephone interview with *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Zirker said he was coming forward to help solve a murder. Carl Holland on Monday maintained his father's innocence and said Zirker is "writing a real fictitious story." Tom Holland went on to help form the National Mustang Association in Iron County before his death in 1980.

See Larry Zirker's account in the April 19, 2011 issue of *The Salt Lake Tribune* by reporter Nate Carlisle at sltrib.com.

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