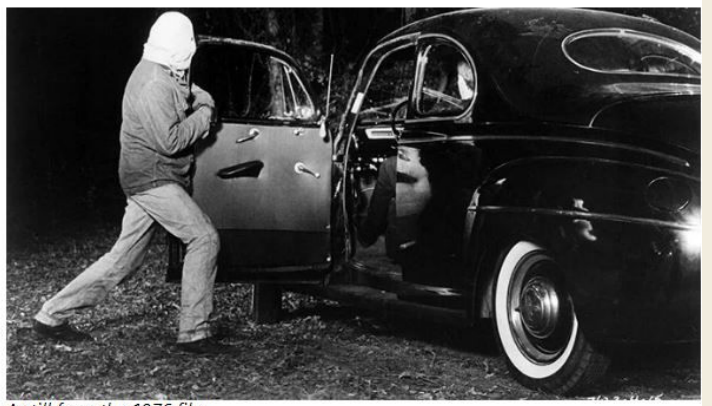


The Phantom Killer

The Victims



A still from the 1979 film 'The Town That Dreaded Sundown'. (Photograph from American International Photofest)

Jimmy Hollis and Mary Larey

Jimmy Hollis and Mary Jeanne Larey went on a date that ended on a rural road just off Richmond in Texarkana. However, the young lovers were interrupted by a man wearing a burkap mask. The man appeared at the window and shined a flashlight into the vehicle. He demanded the couple get out of the car.

The man hit Jimmy in the head with the gun cracking his skull. His attention was then focused on Mary Jeanne. He told her to run and proceeded to chase her down. Mary Jeanne was also hit in the head before being sexually assaulted with the gun.

The couple was traumatized but survived their nightmare. Neither could clearly identify the perpetrator.

- 1 The site where Jimmy Hollis and Mary Jeanne were attacked by the Phantom Killer
- 2 The house Mary Jeanne ran to after being assaulted by a masked assailant.



Richard Griffin and Polly Ann Moore

Richard L. Griffin and Polly Ann Moore were the next victims of the killer and the first to be killed. The two were found dead by a passing motorist on March 24, 1946 in Griffin's car parked on what is now S. Robison Rd. 100 yards south of Highway 67.

The motorist at first thought that both were asleep. Griffin was found between the front seats on his knees with his head resting on his crossed hands and his pockets turned inside out; Moore was found sprawled face-down in the back seat. There is evidence however to suggest that she was placed there after being killed on a blanket outside the car. Both had been shot in the back of the head and were fully clothed.

Richard Griffin and Polly Ann were found dead here in what was referred to as "Lovers' Lane".



Paul Martin & Bobby Jo Booker

Paul Martin and Bobby Jo Booker were just a couple teenagers. Bobby Jo played the saxophone for the Rhythmairs at the VFW earlier that night. Paul came to visit her from Kilgore, Texas. He was taking her to a slumber party, but they decided to go to the park first. It was a fatal mistake.

Martin's body was discovered on the edge of North Park Road. He had been shot four times; one bullet entered the back of his neck and exited through the front of the skull, one entered through the left shoulder, one went through his right hand and the final one went in his face.

A search party was assembled to look for Booker. Six hours later, her body was discovered behind a tree around two miles from Martin's body; she had been shot once through the chest and once in the face.

Paul Martin and Betty Jo Booker were abducted here; Martin's car was later found not far from the entrance.

Paul Martin's body was dumped out of the assailant's vehicle on the north side of North Park Road.

Betty Jo was taken into a wooded area off Morris Ln, a secluded gravel road that now is Galleria Oaks



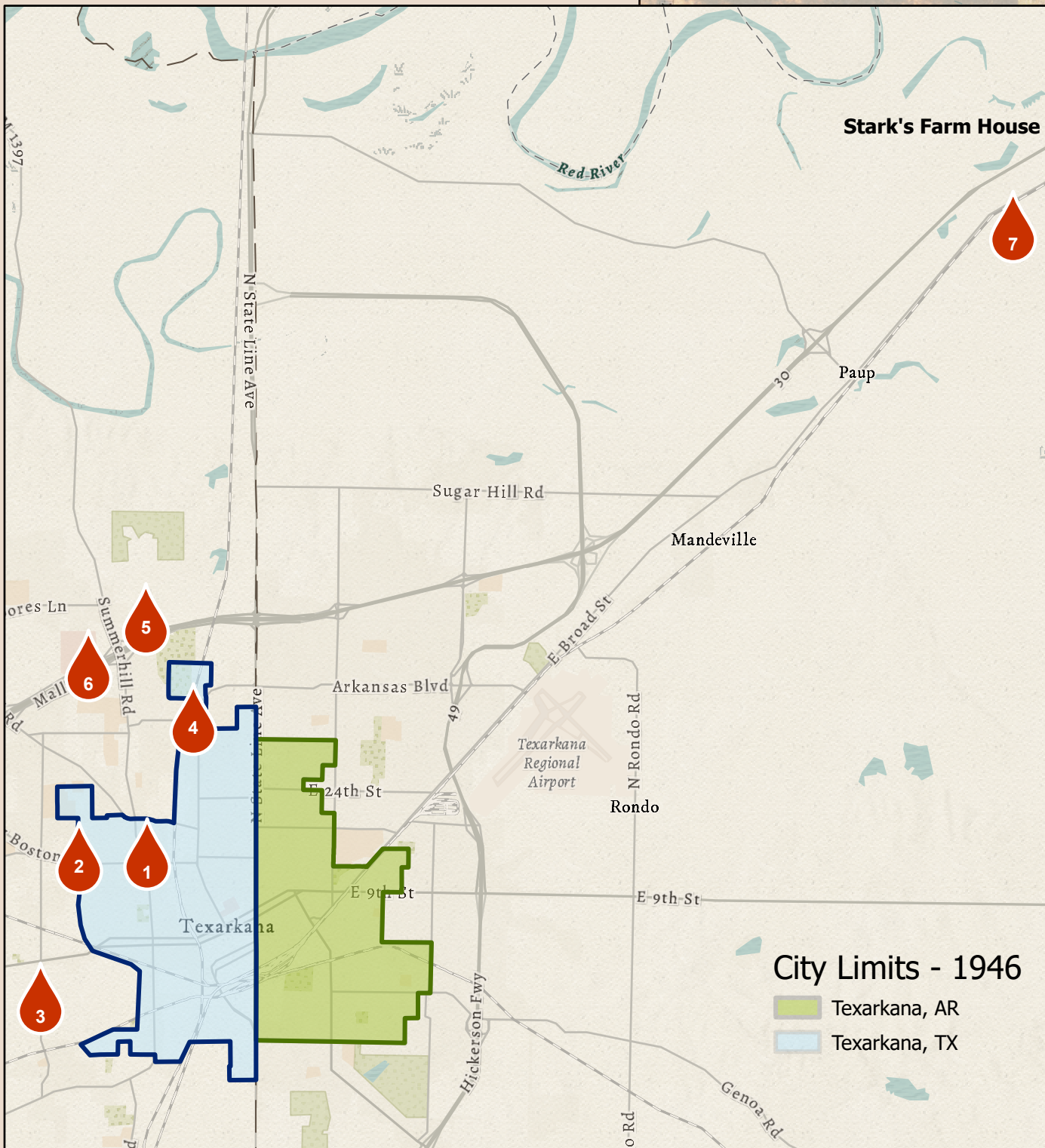
Texas Ranger Manuel Gonzales - shows window with bullet hole.

Virgil and Katie Stark

Virgil and Katie Starks lived in a small farm house 10-miles to the northeast of Texarkana. At night Virgil would read the paper and listen to the radio. Katie was in her bedroom.

Virgil was shot through the window of his home, Katie heard the noise and found him slumped forward in his chair, covered in blood. She went to the telephone to call for help but was shot twice in the face - one bullet knocking out multiple teeth and the other bullet exiting behind her ear. She heard the assailant through the back door and she ran out the front to her sister's house. Her sister wasn't home so she ran to a neighbor's house to safety.

Virgil and Katie Starks farm house



Timeline

February 22, 1946

Jimmy Hollis and Mary Jeanne Larey survived the attack.

March 24, 1946

Richard Griffin and Polly Ann Moore were found dead on the back roads of Bowie County, Texas.

April 14, 1946

Paul Martin and Betty Joe Booker were found dead in Bowie County, Texas.

May 3, 1946

Virgil Starks was murdered in his home. His wife Katy Starks survived.



See the Story Map Here

Texarkana is geographically unique in its location on the border of Texas and Arkansas. Traveling through this small, idyllic town you would never guess its terrifying past.

In 1946, a sadistic killer in a white mask terrorized the small, Norman Rockwellian town to its very bones.

The horrifying murders of couples on "Lovers' Lane" caused a media frenzy and panic froze the entire town. In a place where no one ever thought to lock their doors, people started boarding up their windows at night and barring the doors. People who never owned a gun began to sleep with loaded pistols by their side.

Rather than television and social media, this was a time when information was received by way of radio and newspaper. The Texarkana Gazette would soon dub him the "Phantom Killer".

So horrific were the moonlight murders on Texarkana's "Lovers' Lane" that Hollywood would later make a movie titled "The Town That Dreaded Sundown".



Murder in the Moonlight

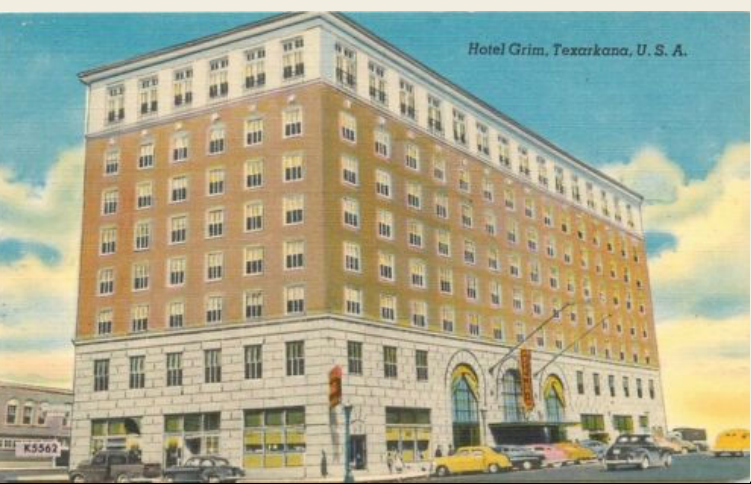
The Law



Manuel "Lone Wolf" Gonzales - Texas Ranger

Law enforcement responded by swarming Texarkana. The FBI showed up and the Texas Rangers commandeered a spot at the Hotel Grim downtown.

There weren't many leads. The Texas Ranger in charge of the investigation was Manuel T. Gonzales.



The Suspect

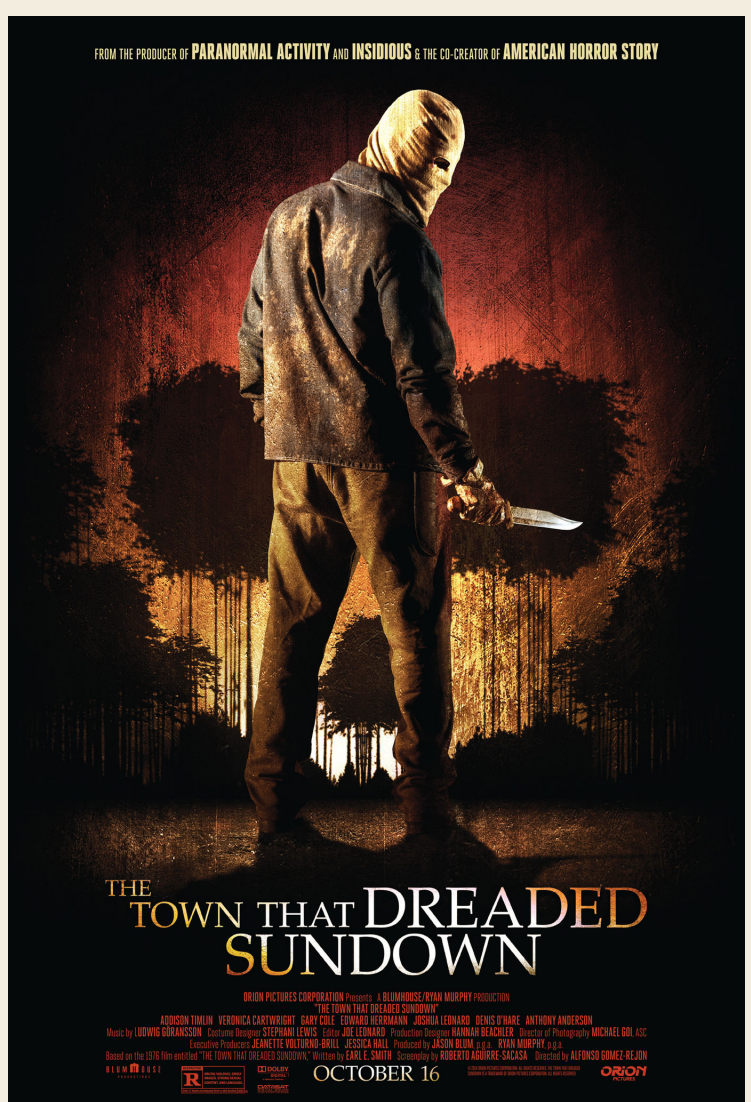


Youell Swinney

Youell Swinney was the prime suspect in the Phantom Killers. Although his wife Peggy confessed to her husband's actions, she later recanted. The Texas Rangers and Sheriff Bill Presley were not convinced that Swinney was the Phantom. Swinney denied being the Phantom and never made a confession.

Unknown as either a sick prank or a true confession, an anonymous woman contacted family members of the victims, one in 1999 and another in 2000, apologizing for what her father had done. Youell Swinney was not known to have ever had a daughter.

The Legend



In 1977, Arkansas Charles B. Pierce produced an R-rated horror film called 'The Town that Dreaded Sundown' with the tagline, "In 1946 this man killed five people... Today he still lurks the streets of Texarkana, Arkansas." It starred Academy Award-winning actor Ben Johnson, Dawn Wells of Gilligan's Island, and Andrew Prine. Though it purported to be based on the true story of the Texarkana Moonlight Murders, many people dispute its accuracy. It remains a minor cult classic.

In 2014 "The town that Dreaded Sundown" was remade by Blumhouse productions and Ryan Murphy Productions, distributed by Orion Picture.

To date, the identity of the Phantom Killer remains unknown. While theoretically still open, it is considered a cold case.