



Indiana Law Enforcement Memorial

NEWS RELEASE

Tuesday, July 27, 2021

State Parole Agent Murdered Over 40 Years Ago is Honored Becomes Indiana's First Female African-American Line of Duty Death

Gary | Today, [Parole Agent Vanessa Cook](#) of the Indiana Department of Correction is being honored on the Indiana Law Enforcement Memorial over 40 years after her ultimate sacrifice and the culmination of 14 years of research to establish her eligible line of duty death.

In the afternoon of Saturday, November 15, 1980, the 25-year-old, fully-clothed body of Cook was found shot to death about 50 feet from the roadway in a heavily wooded area by children playing near 25th Avenue and Taney Street in the Small Farms neighborhood of Gary. She had been last seen on Wednesday at 6 pm driving alone in the 5300 block of West 21st Avenue and was reported missing by family members the following day.

Earlier Saturday, Cook's wallet was located near 21st Avenue and Madison Street with identification and credit cards but without any money. Her car, later seen being driven near the Dorie Miller Homes at 1722 East 21st Avenue, was reported on fire Sunday afternoon at the entrance to Waldheim Cemetery at 19th Place and Pierce Street.

It was believed that Cook was killed elsewhere and upon autopsy, Lake County Coroner Albert T. Willardo M.D., found she had been shot three times, once under her right eye at close range with a large caliber gun and ruled her death a homicide. She had served as a parole agent for three years and was assigned to the Gary Parole District handling juvenile cases in Lake County.

Vanessa Cook was born on January 20, 1955 in East Chicago. She graduated from Roosevelt High School in East Chicago and later attended Vincennes University before receiving her degree at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. She was single and survived by her parents, Frank Sr. and Edna (née Robinson); brother, Frank Jr.; sisters, Dana Lynn Cook and Janet Adrienne (Clyde W. Jr.) Riley; maternal grandfather, Ervin Robinson; paternal grandmother, Mattie Cooper; and boyfriend, Chester Pryor. Burial was at Oak Hill Cemetery in Gary.

These details were readily obtained and confirmed soon after Cook's incident was discovered in May 2007. It could not, however, be verified whether she was killed as a direct result of action taken against her as a law enforcement officer or if it was a random violent crime and one of the 85 reported murders in Gary, the second highest in the state that year after Indianapolis.

The Gary Parole District was contacted to inquire about any knowledge of their fellow officer's death but none of the current staff were able to provide any information. The Gary Police Department was then contacted to ascertain if the case remained open or if any suspects were ever apprehended but a response was never received despite repeated attempts.

By March 2008 when an eligibility determination could not be made, further research in the case was suspended. It was not until years later as additional newspaper archives became available were articles found reporting on the suspects' arrests. Their involvement verified Cook's murder was due to her duties as a law enforcement officer, substantiating a line of duty death and a reopening of the case.

Three males, all from Gary, who had abducted Cook at gunpoint in her car while in downtown Gary before raping and killing her, were subsequently arrested and charged. Carl Crawford, 17, who was arrested over a week after the crime at his sister's home in Kalamazoo, Michigan, later pleaded guilty to assisting a criminal while Josea Carter, 16, pleaded guilty to rape after they both testified against the shooter.

Lem Williams Jr., 19, a parolee under her supervision later pleaded guilty to be spared the death penalty and was sentenced on December 6, 1982 by Lake Superior Judge Richard W. Maroc to 55 years in prison for her murder. After his discharge in January 2009, he was charged with the attempted rape of a 15-year-old girl at her father's house in Gary in 2013 but later found not guilty by a jury.

The Indiana Law Enforcement Memorial is pleased to finally recognize Parole Agent Cook who becomes the first known female African-American, as well as the second known female, law enforcement line of duty death in Indiana. She is also the 14th fallen member of the Indiana Department of Correction and the 58th that has originated from Lake County.

Through the efforts of Co-Founder Jeffrey Williams, this marks the 80th such historical officer successfully researched by him since 2003 and who has been responsible for bringing the long-awaited recognition to four of the first six law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in our state's history. Any questions regarding this news release should be directed to: info@inlem.org.

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