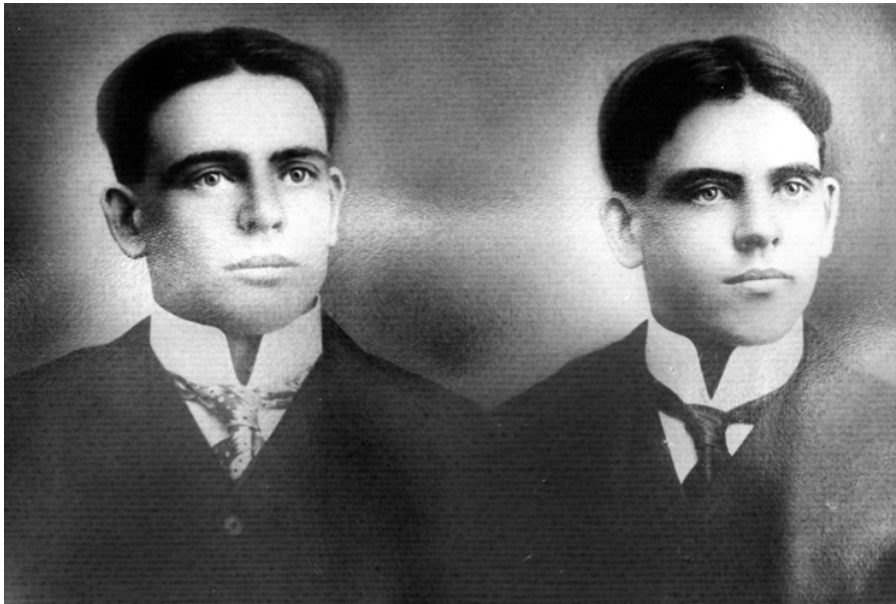


## Herbert Merton Cooley and Elizabeth Holliday and Edith Jones

Herbert Merton Cooley (Mert) and his twin brother, Robert Berton (Bert), were born 15 Oct 1875<sup>1</sup> to Robert Reed Cooley (1840-1917) and Stella Alfresine Owen (1850-1920) in McGregor, Clayton County, Iowa



Merton and Berton about 1895

The twins grew up in the McGregor area to about age 20. Some time before 1894<sup>a</sup> the Robert Reed Cooley family consisting of Robert Reed, Stella Alfresine Owen, Robert Berton and Herbert Merton came to Pierce County, Nebraska, where they settled in Plainview.

On 26 Apr 1905 on the Holliday farm in Knox County Nebraska, Herbert Merton Cooley and Jane Elizabeth Holliday (b. 20 Mar 1884 in Castle Sowerby, Cumberland, England, and d. 1 Jan 1908 in Crofton) were wed.<sup>2</sup>



Herbert Merton Cooley and Jane Elizabeth Holliday

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<sup>a</sup> Their fourth child, Glenn Syren Cooley, was born in Plainview 14 Jul 1894

Ronald Delos Cooley was born to the couple in Crofton 28 Jan 1906 and their second child, Merton Beth Cooley, was born 7 Dec 1907 also in Crofton. Unfortunately, Elizabeth Holliday died shortly after Beth was born. She is buried in Pleasant View Cemetery, Plainview, Pierce County, Nebraska, USA.



Because of the tragic loss of their mother, Ronald went to live with his grandparents, RR Cooley and Stella Owen in Plainview, Nebraska, while Beth went to live with his uncle RB Cooley in McLean, Nebraska.

About two years later on 29 Jun 1910, Merton was married to his second wife, Edith Jones (b. 15 Aug 1879 in Iowa). This union produced one child Edith Dixie Cooley<sup>3</sup> (b. 4 Aug 1911 in Flagler, Kit Carson County, Colorado, d. 10 Aug 1981 in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois).



Edith Jones and Herbert Merton Cooley

## Crofton Newspapers

At some point after 1906, Merton Cooley went into a partnership with Mel Lawrence to operate the *Crofton Progress* newspaper in Crofton, Knox County, Nebraska.<sup>4</sup>

It is also known from a *Crofton Journal* microform<sup>5</sup> (a MARC<sup>b</sup> record) that the first edition of the *Crofton Journal* was published 7 Jun 1906 with editors and publishers Peterson & Alwine. In October 1908 J.B. McCoy bought the newspaper.<sup>6</sup>

Also from the microform it is learned the *Crofton Journal* absorbed the *Crofton Progress* on 7 Dec 1911. Since the *Journal* was a sole proprietorship in 1913 it can be assumed Merton took control of the newspaper in late 1911, purchasing it from J.B. McCoy.



*Crofton Journal* office, Crofton Nebraska, Herbert M Cooley is in front of the counter and a printer's devil is behind him. To the right are cans of paint for sale.

### TRAGEDY AT MISSOURI RIVER

*Yankton Press and Dakotan*, 4 Nov 1914

#### **Two Men from Crofton lose lives at river early this morning. The car plunged into stream. Two in car escape and tell thrilling story of accident**

O.W. Cass, a druggist of Crofton Neb, and H.M. Cooley, editor of the *Crofton Journal* were drowned in the Missouri River at 2 o'clock this morning when Mr. Cass' auto, a Ford, plunged over the side of the pontoon bridge into 12 to 14 feet of water.

O.D. Salley, barber, and L.S. Ross, jeweler, also of Crofton, were members of the party but although both experienced the terrible plunge into the river and hit the sandbar at the bottom, both managed to rise clear of the car and get to shore but hardly able to relate how; Salley especially, who was nearly drowned, is in a state of collapse over the loss of his intimate friend, Mr. Cooley. [The bodies of Cass and Cooley were never found]

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<sup>b</sup> MARC stands for MACHine Readable Cataloging, and it is an encoding standard that provides a framework for library catalog records. Specifically, it is the framework for bibliographic records, which describe library resources both for search purposes and for patron information.

Mr. Cass, who was in need of some drug supplies, left Crofton eighteen miles south and a little west yesterday afternoon for Yankton, driving his Ford and bringing the businessmen of Crofton named above. They remained in town for the election returns,<sup>c</sup> took supper at the Harris Café and started for the river shortly before two o'clock. Mr. Cass, owner of the car was driving. He is a married man and in town and had boasted for what he could do with his car saying he could make it describe a figure eight so well did he have it under control. He also remarked that as all his party could drive the car, they were in good shape to get home safe.



Yankton pontoon bridge across the Missouri River<sup>7</sup>

At the river, John Strand, who was in charge of the bridge, collected the toll from the four men, chatted with them for several minutes, let down the chain used at night at the car passed on. Mr. Cass was driving and with him in the front seat was Mr. Salley, the Crofton barber. Mr. Ross, jeweler, was in the back seat with Editor Cooley, the latter on the right side, back of Mr. Salley. It is likely the driver was pinned under the car, still holding the steering wheel, while Mr. Cooley was not able, possibly through a blow on the head, to extricate himself as the two survivors managed to do.

The tragedy, which from the evidence at hand, was due to too fast driving on the bridge took place about fifty feet from the Nebraska shore in the deepest and swiftest part of the river. The track shows the car veered, or was driven close to the east side of the bridge. The speed of the car was great enough to allow of its climbing to the top of the six by six timber that forms the base of the rail. Along this timber for eight feet or so a wheel of the car ran, breaking the edge of the timber in one place and leaving a trail of grease. The car then reached the open space between rails where the boats are and here the plunge into the river occurred.

L.S. Ross, the survivor, who was in the left hand rear seat tells a thrilling story of his escape. He states the car was going fairly fast, but he is under the impression that Cass slowed down somewhat as he neared the Nebraska shore. Then came a great crash, he would say it was the steering gear broke somewhere and in a second car and occupants were over the side and into the river.

Mr. Ross recalls distinctly hitting the bed of the river, which seemed to him a great distance down. He rose to the surface at once and found he had in some way grabbed a portion of the bridge rail. He was heavily wrapped, as were all the party, with a heavy coat and swimming to shore, although a good swimmer, proved a very hard task. He reached the south bank, which at this point is ten feet high. Exhausted, he could not climb up and so removed his overcoat and tried again, but could not until he had

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<sup>c</sup> The 1914 United States elections elected the members of the 64th United States Congress, occurring in the middle of Democratic President Woodrow Wilson's first term. Democrats retained control of both houses of Congress, the first time they were able to do so since the American Civil War (1861-1865). Republicans won massive gains in the House, but Democrats maintained a solid majority in the chamber. In the first Senate election since the passage of the 17th Amendment, Democrats won small gains, maintaining control of the chamber.

also removed his other coat. He just managed then to climb up and the trail he left is still visible. Ross then shouted to his companions, got no answer and started a search.

He found Salley a short distance downstream, waist deep in water, alive but exhausted and helpless. He had reached shore but was unable to get out of the river. Ross helped Salley out and by this time the toll man Strand reached the scene of the accident. He reports that after the men left he listened outside, as he often does, to hear the car pass over. He noticed the sound of the car over the bridge had ceased, supposed the sandbar that breaks the bridge at this point had been reached in safety and entered the "shack" at the north end of the bridge. Hardly had he done so when he heard a shout for help and at once hurried to the scene where he found Ross and Salley, the latter unable to explain anything but Ross able to give the account of the accident as given above.

Word was sent up town and Clarence Novothy and Elmer Bergsvik who were still engaged in election returns, were amongst the first to respond. They hurried to the river, took the two survivors by car to the Scott bath parlors, secured dry clothes for them and with Mr. Scott soon had the men warm and comfortable.

They then returned to the bridge and river and after great effort managed to locate the auto stuck in sand and water to the depth of fourteen feet and as many feet from the east side of the bridge. They tied a hook to the car but the current soon broke the hold made and a second had to be made which was still holding this morning.

[Yankton County] Sheriff Ratheaber was notified and was at the river a half hour after the incident happened. He at once noted the tragedy was one for the coroner and sheriff of Cedar County as the dividing line is the center of the river and the car was within fifty feet of the Nebraska shore. He at once return to town and wired Sheriff McFadden in [the County Seat of Cedar County] Hartington, Nebraska. No answer had been received up to nine AM at which time the above was written

Efforts made to locate the bodies of Cass and Cooley were futile although all that could be done was done during the night hours. The case now awaits the action of the officers of Cedar County and preparations are being made from this point to drag the river if the Nebraska authorities come unprepared. Ropes and hooks are in readiness and a determined effort will be made to secure the bodies as the car is removed.

Both dead men are prominent citizens of Crofton, Mr. Cooley being a Mason. Messrs. Ross and Salley were driven to Crofton early this morning where they went to break the news to relatives, especially to the widow of Mr. Cass. They expected to return with help to assist in the recovery of the bodies.

Mr Cooley is a widower with three children, one<sup>d</sup> of whom resides in Crofton. Mr Cass is married but has no children. The survivors are both also married. All have been identified with Crofton for a number of years and as soon as Ross and Salley arrived in Crofton with their sad news the town was personally stirred.

At press time the auto has been hauled out but no trace of the bodies was found underneath and no success has been achieved in the efforts to find the bodies nearby. Sheriff McFadden of Hartington and the coroner of the same place were over but could hold no inquest until at least one body was found and returned home. They deputized R.E. Cook of Crofton to act for them and superintend the dragging operations.

About two hundred friends of the drowned men were at the bank from Crofton and vicinity and among them was Mrs. Cass widow of the drowned druggist. The car showed a badly bent front axle, the result of hitting the heavy timber of the side rail and was otherwise damaged but the steering wheel was intact.

The car had turned turtle in the air and water and was found lying on its side with the top to the west. The dragging operations are being attended with great difficulty as the stream is very powerful at this point. For this reason there is the greatest uncertainty as to where the bodies may be.

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<sup>d</sup> Residing in Crofton was Dixie, half-sister of Ron and Beth. She was the daughter of Merton and second wife of Edith Jones. Ron was living with grandparents in Flagler Colorado while Beth was with Bert and Lou in Otis at the time of the accident.

## Still Search for Bodies

### Many Searchers active along river seeking bodies of Cass and Cooley

*Yankton Press and Dakotan*, 6 Nov 1914

Search was resumed at the river early this morning for the bodies of Mr. Cooley and Mr. Cass. It is believed now that both men came to the surface after their car plunged into the stream and that possibly before death came, the unfortunate men were some distance downstream.

The cap that Mr. Cooley wore was found about a mile downstream on the Nebraska shore near which the current turns after passing the bridge. The finding of the cap means little to the searchers as it may have been lost at the time of the accident and was blown ashore, as this is the theory held by the searchers.

It was expected today to put the ferry boat into the search by one party of searchers and Capt. Geisler gave his consent as he is doing all in his power to aid. A motorboat has been doing good service and is being handled in good shape against the swift current which is seven miles an hour where the accident took place.

The bodies may be washed ashore near where the cap was found yesterday, but river men hold to the opinion the bodies are not likely to be found now until they rise which may be in nine to fifteen days sooner. There is no certainty as to the time as this depends so much on the condition of the bodies and the temperature of the water.

Later note: Mr. Cass' body was recovered but Mr. Cooley's body was never found.

Shortly after the accident, Robert Berton Cooley, Herbert Merton's twin brother, sold the *Otis Independent* (Otis, Washington County, Colorado) and moved to Crofton where he assumed control of the *Crofton Journal*. However, by late 1916 Bert's allergies (hay fever) had become so bad in that northeastern corner of Nebraska near the Missouri River, he had to sell the Crofton newspaper and return to the dry plains of Colorado. There he re-purchased the newspaper he had established in the first place, the *Otis Independent*, continuing its operation until 1929.

The Missouri River was Herbert Merton Cooley's eternal graveyard. He is remembered on his first wife's gravestone in Pleasant View Cemetery, Plainview, Nebraska. Death information of his second wife, Edith Jones, has so far not been found. One possibility is she died in childbirth in Colorado but there is no record of that. Another possibility is she died in northeastern Nebraska but there is no record of that either.

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> WWI Draft Registration Card Serial Number 373 for Robert Berton Cooley: Date of Birth October 15<sup>th</sup> 1876

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2ZL-MKPL>

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### MARRIAGE RECORD.

Under Gen. Co. 11, Homesteaded Marriages, Knox Co., Neb.

Mr. Robert M. Cooley } No. 5665  
 M. Jane E. Holliday } Before the County Judge of Knox County, Nebraska,

#### MARRIAGE LICENSE.

THE STATE OF NEBRASKA, } SS. OFFICE OF THE COUNTY JUDGE.  
 KNOX COUNTY, }

LICENSE is hereby granted to any person authorized to solemnize marriage according to the laws of said State, to join in Marriage  
 Mr. Robert Merton Cooley and Mrs. Jane Elizabeth Holliday  
 of Pierce County.

NAME OF PARTIES	AGE	COLOR	PLACE OF BIRTH	RESIDENCE	FATHER'S NAME	MOTHER'S MARRIAGE
<u>Robert M. Cooley</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Illinois</u>	<u>Pleasant</u>	<u>Pleasant</u>	<u>Stella Owen</u>
<u>Jane E. Holliday</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>England</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>Hugh Holliday</u>	<u>"</u>

and the person joining them in Marriage is required to make due return of the annexed Certificate to the County Judge of said County within ninety days of the names of the parties, time and place of marriage, and by whom solemnized.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of said Court at my office,  
 in \_\_\_\_\_ County, Nebraska, this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ A. D. 1915.  
J. C. Logan County Judge

#### CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE.

To the County Judge of Knox County, Nebraska:

THIS CERTIFIES, that on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ A. D. 1915, at \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ County, according to law and by authority, I duly joined in Marriage Mr. Robert Merton Cooley and Mrs. Jane Elizabeth Holliday and there were present as witnesses Mr. and Mrs. Bert Johnson and Mr. and Mrs. Cooley.

GIVEN under my hand this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ A. D. 1915.  
W. P. Holman Clergyman

<sup>3</sup> Edith Dixie Cooley Colorado birth certificate

CERTIFICATION OF VITAL RECORD

### STATE OF COLORADO

Bureau of Vital Statistics 6380

CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH

Registration District No. 121 File No. \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF CHILD Edith Dixie Cooley Registered As \_\_\_\_\_

Sex <u>Female</u>	Age at Birth <u>4</u>	Color <u>White</u>	Birth Place <u>Lowry</u>
FATHER <u>Robert M. Cooley</u>	MOTHER <u>Stella Owen</u>	RESIDENCE <u>Lowry, Colo.</u>	AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY <u>9</u>
AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY <u>35</u>	COLOR <u>White</u>	BIRTH PLACE <u>Lowry</u>	AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY <u>9</u>
PLACED <u>Lowry</u>	BIRTH PLACE <u>Lowry</u>	OCCUPATION <u>Housewife</u>	

Number of children of this mother now living 4

CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDING PHYSICIAN OR MIDWIFE

I hereby certify that I attended the birth of this child, and that it occurred on \_\_\_\_\_ A. D. 1915, at \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Thayer Cooley

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THIS IS A TRUE AND CORRECT COPY OF THE OFFICIAL RECORD WHICH IS IN MY CUSTODY.

DATE ISSUED MAR 27 2002 Registrar Ronald S. Hyman

Do not accept unless prepared on security paper with engraved border displaying the Colorado state seal and signature of the Registrar. PENALTY BY LAW, Section 25-2-118, Colorado Revised Statutes, 1963, if any person alters, uses, attempts to use or furnishes to another for deceptive use any vital statistics record. NOT VALID IF PHOTOCOPIED.

<sup>4</sup> N.W. Ayer & Son's Newspaper Annual and Directory, 1911; p 540

<sup>5</sup> The Crofton Journal [microform] Crofton, Neb., 1906-current; LCCN (Library of Congress Control Number) en 950385; OCLC 33053184

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<sup>6</sup> *Compendium of History, Reminiscence and Biography of Nebraska containing a History of the State of Nebraska*, Alden Publishing Co, Chicago, 1912

<sup>7</sup> In 1890 a pontoon bridge was installed over the Missouri linking Yankton, South Dakota, with rural Cedar County, Nebraska. To protect against ice damage, the pontoon structure was disassembled each year before the winter freeze. Efforts to build a more permanent bridge began in 1915, but lapsed with the country's entrance into World War I. The nearby Meridian Highway Bridge was finally completed in 1924.