

# The Murder of Juanita Kelly



Juanita Kelly, date unknown  
Photo courtesy Texas' Last Frontier Historical Museum

By all accounts twenty-one-year-old Juanita Kelly was a lively, beautiful, fun-loving young woman with big brown eyes, dark curly hair, dimples and a “distinctly feminine” figure. Juanita had moved from the family farm near Morton to Clovis, New Mexico to work as a waitress where she had fallen in love and gotten engaged. Excited to tell her father and mother, Sam and Dollie Kelly, the good news, Juanita returned to her parents’ farm eight miles northeast of Morton. Always willing to lend a hand, Juanita spent her time at home helping her mother with the housework and her father in the fields.

The Kelly family spent Saturday, October 17, 1936 picking cotton and the family quit work early and loaded up in the car and headed for Morton to conduct business and celebrate the end of the week. With business finished the family decided to attend the only entertainment in town that night, a cowboy movie at the Wallace Theater. Juanita chose instead to go to the dance hall five miles west of Morton to attend a widely advertised dance. After agreeing to meet her parents and siblings at eleven o’clock, Juanita drove the family car to the dance.

She returned, alone, from the dance thirty minutes late. After being scolded by her mother, she apologized and said that she was having such a good time she forgot to watch the clock. Juanita then informed her parents that she had a date with Asa Smith and wanted to return to the dance. Her parents reluctantly consented after agreeing that the Smith boy was an intelligent, well respected young man and could be trusted to escort their daughter. “I’m going to meet him at the post office,” were the last words Juanita ever spoke to her parents as they watched her walk away from the Wallace Theater in the direction of the post office.

Sunday morning it was discovered Juanita had not returned home, and her parents decided she must have stayed over at one of her girlfriends. Worry sat in when she did not return later that day; Juanita was not the type of girl to worry her parents, and would typically send

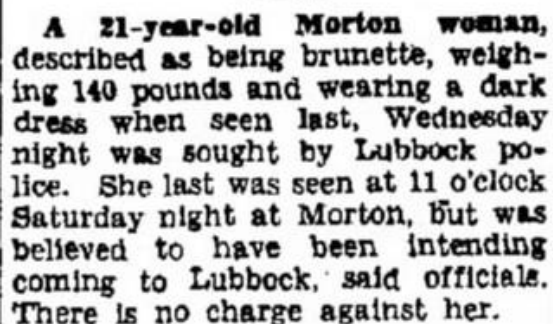
word of where she was. The anxiety increased on Monday morning when Dollie Kelly, Juanita's mother, became distraught over a dream she had Sunday night in which Juanita was lying in a shallow grave naked, blood-smearred and mutilated. In an effort to console his wife, Sam said to her, "Remember the old saying, dream of a marriage and it means a death, dream of death and it means a marriage. Juanita's going to marry that fellow over at Clovis, that's what your dream means!" Her fear was not eased, nor was his worry.

By the morning of Tuesday, October 20<sup>th</sup> there was still no word from Juanita, her mother was inconsolable and her father had grown so worried he dropped his work in the middle of the harvest and set out to make inquiries among Juanita's friends and relatives. None of them knew where she was. He headed to the Sheriff's Office in Morton where he spoke with Deputy Reed House. Deputy House suspected the girl had gone back to Clovis to her fiancé. The deputy phoned the Clovis police and asked them to check with the girl's fiancé to see if she had returned home. Sam asked the deputy to check with the Smith boy.

Later that evening a Clovis officer spoke with Sheriff John Crockett, stating that the girl's fiancé had not seen Juanita since she left over three weeks ago and was genuinely worried when told she was reported missing. The fiancé also had an alibi for the night of the dance, having proved he was with another girl the night Juanita disappeared. The officer stated they would check with officers in Hobbs to see if Juanita could be traced through other friends.

Officers in Hobbs contacted Sheriff Crockett on Wednesday, Juanita was not in Hobbs.

Sheriff Crockett thought it possible Juanita had gone Lubbock, so he contacted the Lubbock County Sheriff's Office Wednesday evening, who in turn contacted the local radio station and newspapers to broadcast the girl's description and circumstances of her disappearance.



**A 21-year-old Morton woman, described as being brunette, weighing 140 pounds and wearing a dark dress when seen last, Wednesday night was sought by Lubbock police. She last was seen at 11 o'clock Saturday night at Morton, but was believed to have been intending coming to Lubbock, said officials. There is no charge against her.**

Bulletin published in the  
Lubbock Morning Avalanche describing Juanita Kelly  
Thursday, October 22, 1936

Sheriff Crockett decided to go speak with Juanita's fiancé himself while Deputy House interviewed others who attended the dance. According to those interviewed, Juanita seemed to be having the "time of her life" and even though more than a dozen young men had danced with her, no one had seen Juanita leave the dance or who she left with, and no one remembered seeing her at the dance after 11:30.

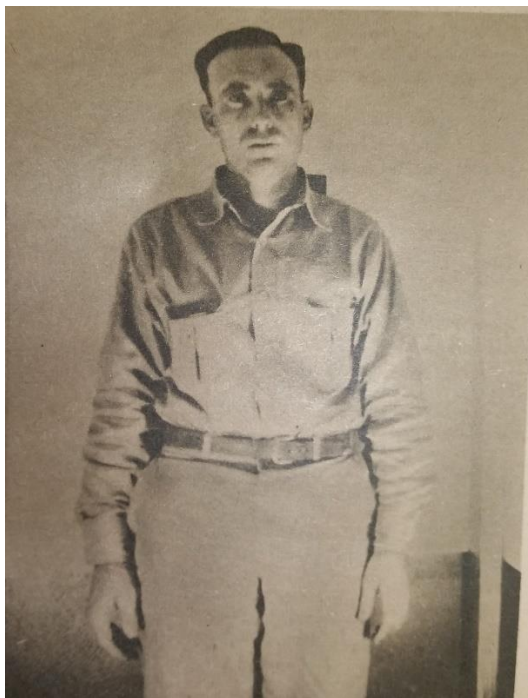
Deputy House saved Asa Smith for last and questioned him carefully. Smith was irritated at the questioning, stating "I didn't take Juanita home. Furthermore, I don't like the talk that is going around town. It seems like I was supposed to take Juanita home, well, I didn't!" Smith

went on to state that he had taken his girl and her friend to the dance with him and between dancing with his girl and finding partners for the friend, he kept busy. He took both of the girls home, stopping in town at a local café first to get something to eat. Smith went on to say he had seen Juanita dancing with Odis Cooper, who was at the dance without his wife. Interviews with the two women Smith escorted to and from the dance revealed that Smith and the girls left the dance hall at 11:30 and he dropped them off at home around midnight.



Cochran County Sheriff John S. Crockett  
Image courtesy Texas' Last Frontier Historical Museum

Deputy House stopped by the Cooper farm to question Odis, who he found supervising a gang of cotton-pickers. Cooper was nervous, fidgeting foot to foot. “I don’t like to be mixed up in this affair any more than I have to, I left my wife at her mother’s that night, and she didn’t know I was going to the dance.” Cooper went on to admit he danced with Juanita several times that evening. When asked if he had seen Juanita leave the dance, Cooper stated “I did see her leave in a car with Asa Smith somewhere around 11:30. I had gone to my car to take a drink and had to back up so that Smith could get his machine out of the jumble of cars.” When asked if he was sure it was Asa Smith he saw leave with Juanita, Cooper replied, “Dead sure.”



Lee Odis Cooper 1936

Photo courtesy Texas' Last Frontier Historical Museum

Questioning of several of Cooper's associates revealed the man was "head over heels" in love with Juanita and the two had been having an affair for over a year. That Saturday night was not the first night Cooper had taken his two daughters and wife to her mother's home when he had "special work" to do. Further investigation revealed Cooper and Juanita were able to meet without arousing widespread gossip because Cooper's wife, Lois, and Juanita were cousins.

Saturday, a week after the dance, Sheriff Crockett and Deputy House had given up hope of finding Juanita alive and spend that day and the next scouring the county roads and lands around the dance hall searching for evidence of her body or a grave but found nothing. Juanita's disappearance seemed fated to remain a mystery.

On the afternoon of Monday, October 26, 1936, a trembling Odis Cooper, his face twisted in grief and horror, burst in to Sheriff Crockett's office and shouted "I've found the body of Juanita Kelly!"

"She's dead?" questioned Sheriff Crockett. "Dead and buried on my farm!" replied Cooper miserably.

Deputy House asked Cooper when he found her body, to which he replied "last Thursday". "I interviewed you last Friday! Why didn't you tell me then?" Deputy House snapped.

"You don't know the hell I've been through since I found that body! I was scared to death that I would be implicated!" Cooper cried. "Yesterday I went to Rule and saw my brother, he told me to get back here and tell you. I told my wife and mother-in-law this morning, they gave the same advice. I'm awfully sorry Mr. House!"

Cooper went on to tell how he came across tire tracks in his Sudan field, about half a mile north of his farmhouse, Thursday evening while driving out stray cattle from a neighboring field. To his knowledge, no automobiles had been in the field so he followed the strange zig-zag trail and finally came across a mound of freshly turned earth. He then dug in the mound with his

hands until he touched cold flesh and panic-stricken, hastily covered the small hole up. "I knew it must be Juanita, even before I went there with my shovel and uncovered enough of the body so that I could tell for sure. I just didn't know what to do!" He stated it was late Thursday night when he returned to the gravesite with his shovel and partially uncovered the body. He claimed he tried to lift it by the head, but the body was wedged so tightly he could only dislodge the upper part. He tried unsuccessfully to remove the body again early Monday morning.

"You should have told me this before," House stated after hearing Cooper's story. "I'll have to arrest you for withholding information from officers." Cooper was arrested and placed in the county jail.

They moved swiftly to recover Juanita's body and within a quarter of an hour, District Attorney Dan Blair and his assistant, Burton Burks of Lubbock were racing to Morton. Justice J. P. Taylor, Dr. R. E. Rushing, Dr. D. T. Jordan, and Juanita's father, Sam Kelly, were all waiting in Sheriff Crockett's office when Blair and Burks arrived. The men traveled to Cooper's farm, two miles south of the dance hall, where Cooper's uncle, Robert Fulton, directed the men to the grave.

Using a small shovel, Deputy House dug through the packed soil, noting out loud that the soil hadn't been disturbed since the heavy rainfall a week before. He also noted the marks on the wall of the grave indicated it had been dug with a grubbing hoe. Once his shovel scraped flesh, House used his hands to remove the remaining soil from the body. Exclamations of horror rose from the circle of men as House completed the task and Sam Kelly fell to his knees and cried brokenly. Juanita Kelly's nude body lay face up, wedged tightly into the fourteen-inch wide grave. A deep slash was across her cheek and her throat had been cut ear-to-ear. Her right eye hung from its socket, caused by a vicious blow which had crushed her right temple. Shredded tatters of her blouse clung to her corpse, her cloak and shoes, which were placed toe-to-heel as if packed in a shoebox, lay at her feet.



Clothing found in the grave with Miss Kelly, all but the shoes had been cut into ribbons

Left to right: a dress, underclothing, shoes, coat and a slip.

Image courtesy Texas' Last Frontier Historical Museum

The ground was packed so hard, Juanita's body could not be moved from the grave. "Cooper never lifted her body from the grave to identify it, her body could not be moved without widening the trench or opening the blood-caked wounds, especially in the neck" House observed. Doctors Rushing and Jordan agreed.

Once the grave was widened enough to remove her, Juanita's body was wrapped in a quilt and covered with a sheet and taken to a vacant business building in Morton and laid on heavy planks supported by two saw-horses so that Justice Taylor could conduct an inquest. Those present to witness the inquest were Dr. F. E. Rushing, Dr. J. T. Jordan, Deputy Sheriff House, Cochran County Judge G. A. Graham, DA Burks, ADA Burks and Sam Kelly.

During the inquest it was found that Juanita's neck had been "dislocated at the second vertebra", and the cut on her throat encircled her entire neck so that the head was barely hanging on by strings of tissue; she had nearly been decapitated. Evidence suggested she had been sexually assaulted as two large bruises were found on Juanita's back above each kidney. "Telltale evidence that burly masculine hands had clutched and held the girl," according to Justice Taylor. Juanita's skirt was missing from the grave and her blouse had been ripped open, exposing her breasts.

Fearing mob violence if held in Morton much longer, Cooper was rushed to the Lubbock County Jail to be questioned by Lubbock County Sheriff Tom Abel and his chief deputy Bedford Carpenter. Sheriff Abel, along with Deputy Carpenter, Patrolman Brooks Penney, DA Daniel Blair and ADA Burton Burks began Cooper's intense interrogation at 10:30 p.m. that night. Cooper maintained he was innocent of anything other than burying Juanita Kelly.

Frustrated with Cooper's inconsistent statements, Sheriff Abel decided to take a different approach. At 4:00 a.m. the morning of Tuesday, October 27, 1936, Sheriff Abel, accompanied by Chief Deputy Carpenter, Sam Fort (a Lubbock police identification expert), Patrolman Brooks Penney, Dan Blair, and Burton Burks escorted Cooper back to Juanita's grave in the Sudan field. They were soon joined by Sheriff Crockett, Deputy House, Mayor R. E. Rose of Morton, Cochran County attorney Lloyd R. Kennedy, Sheriff Clarence Davis and Deputy Carl Crockett of Hockley County, and newspaper reporter, E. F. Huntsucker.

The men stood staring at Cooper. "I've told you all there is nothing to tell," Cooper simply muttered. He complained of being cold and was given a heavy quilt that had been removed from his car, which appeared to have a dollar-sized bloodstain on it. Cooper, wrapped in the quilt, was told to stand in the grave. "Do I have to get in there?" He asked. No one answered. "All right, but I don't like it." Once in the grave Cooper asked Fort and Penney to stand in the grave with him, neither did. The reporter took a photograph of Cooper standing in the grave by flashlight. "Are you going to print this beforehand?" Cooper asked Huntsucker. "Probably." The reporter replied. "I don't think that fair." a dejected looking Cooper stated, but offered no further explanation.



Cooper standing in the empty grave that had concealed Juanita Kelly's mutilated body.  
Left to right: Sam Fort, Odus Cooper, Brooks Penney, Daniel Blair & Burton Burks

Cooper was then seated in a car, guarded by Penney who continued to question him to prevent Cooper from relaxing. While Penney kept Cooper awake, the other men searched the farm house and outhouses. They sifted through loose dirt and inspected the garbage and ash heaps. Cooper's automobile was examined and in it "was detected an odor like that on the floor of the grave." A rough cowskin cover appeared to be shaved or clipped in places and matted hairs were removed. Hair was also recovered from a two-by-four. Fort planned chemical analysis of stains found on the enamel of the car, cushions and another quilt.

They discovered tracks made by a woman wearing sharp heels leading from the farmyard in an erratic course across an open pasture cluttered with mesquite and spiny growths to a dirt road 200 yards east of the grave. Here automobile tracks intercept her progress, and she was forced to turn back into the brush. The tracks showed each time the woman attempted to get to the road, she was turned around. Turning north, parallel to the road it appears she walked beside the car until coming to an intersecting east-west road which she walked down for some distance until she climbs back into the brush, the car following her at times, according to the trail. The woman turns back to the south, toward the farmhouse, and man's footsteps could be found occasionally following behind her. The tracks led back to the house and then turned back in the direction of the grave. In the trampling of livestock, persons, and automobiles, the tracks are lost short of the grave. Juanita's shoes were brought from town and fitted to the clear tracks, but it was unknown if they were identified as the shoes responsible for the tracks.

Cooper complains of hunger and is driven to Sheriff Crockett's house where he is given a hot breakfast before being placed in the county jail at Morton to give Patrolman Penney a break from guarding him. George Smith, Asa Smith's father, shows up to the jail and speaks with

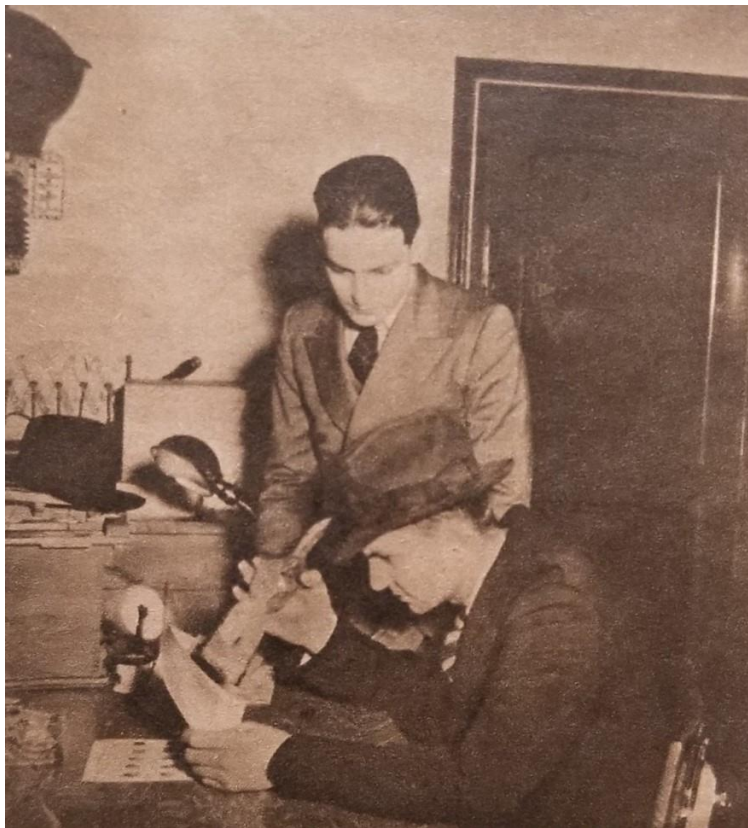
Patrolman Penney, "I've got something I want you to see," he stated, and Penney accompanied Smith back to his farm where he was led to a flower garden in the front of the Smith house. Smith pointed out a heavy metal object on the ground, it was a heavy grubbing hoe without a handle, covered in dried blood smears, the same type which had been used to dig Juanita Kelly's grave. Penney picked up the hoe with a gloved hand. Mr. Smith stated, "A few days ago, my wife told me she saw Odus Cooper pitching this hoe head into the flower garden, right where it lies. He then questioned my wife about Asa's whereabouts." stated Smith. "Because of that blood, I suspected something, and ordered that nobody touched it." Patrolman Penney rushed back to Morton with his find, which was then turned over to Sam Fort.

Asa Smith, whom Cooper had previously accused of taking Juanita home from the dance, confronted Cooper at the Cochran County jail, bringing with him several reputable witnesses.

When Asa appeared in front of him, Cooper's eyes dropped and he seemed to cringe as Asa pointed a finger at him and said, "Ode Cooper, you're a liar if you say I left the dance hall with Juanita!" Cooper said nothing in reply.

Juanita Kelly was laid to rest in Morton Memorial Cemetery at noon that day with Elder O. H. Tabor officiating. She was survived by her father, Sam Kelly; mother, Dollie; brothers Larry and Samuel Jr.; and sisters Willoughby and Romana.

Cooper was returned to Lubbock, where Sheriff Abel and others continued to question him while Fort spent the rest of the day examining the fingerprints on the grubbing hoe head. By that evening Fort had recovered several well-defined prints, every one of them a match to Odus Cooper. When confronted with the evidence Cooper stated, "I haven't been telling the truth, but the real story makes it look still worse for me than what I've already told."



Sam Fort compares fingerprints found on the grubbing hoe head to Odus Cooper's prints while Patrolman Brooks Penney looks on. Image courtesy Texas' Last Frontier Historical Museum



Cooper began a new confession believed by the lawmen to be “nearly straight”. Cooper stated he picked Juanita up from the post office in Morton after she left her parents. He claimed Juanita had been murdered by two men who chanced upon them while he and the girl were engrossed in drinking and love-making in his car on a dark backroad near his farm.

“Juanita and me went out in my car and had some drinks before the dance busted up. Then we got in the car and drove off down the road and drank some wine. After that we drove to the side road at the north end of my place where it was dark and stopped between the turn rows of the field.

“We hadn’t been there no time at all before a man stepped up out of the dark and stuck a gun in my ribs. He told me to get out of the car and then he got in with Juanita.

“Juanita was pretty tight by this time”, Cooper related, “and when the man failed to rouse her by shaking her, he pulled her out of the car while keeping the gun level at me. The stranger tried to get fresh with Juanita, but she came to and wisecracked at him.” According to Cooper the man became enraged and grabbed a heavy wine bottle from car and beat Juanita in the head with it. “Then I heard a groan that followed the blow.” The man forced Cooper to carry Juanita’s body 200 yards in to the field where he demanded Cooper’s pocketknife. “When I didn’t want to give it to him, he said he’d shoot me and leave us both there. Holding the gun on me he went through my pockets and got my knife and with me looking on, he cut her throat, stuck the knife into her cheek and then cut her deep on the back of the neck.” Cooper stated he protested the savage attacked, but alleged the stranger had told him “Shut up – or you’ll get the same!”

The man then forced Cooper to return to the road where Cooper’s car was parked. “Well, you’ve killed a girl,” he said tauntingly. “What are going to do about it?”

“Before I could answer he had jumped into the car and had driven off. I never got a good look at either of them, not good enough to identify them if I was to see them right now.”

Cooper stopped there, breathing heavily, and asked for a drink of water.

“What did you do then?” Blair asked.

“What could I do? I was alone with a body on my hands. There wasn’t anything to do but bury it. I got my grubbing hoe and made a shallow hole big enough for her and put her into it. Then, when I’d covered it over, I found her shoes on the mudguard of the car, so I had to dig again and put them in at her feet. Somehow that was an awful shock – finding those shoes.”

“How was it that she didn’t have most of her clothes on?” Sheriff Abel asked.

“That was the way they left her and I buried her that way. What I’ve told you is the truth,” Cooper finished soberly, “and if I burn for it – I’ll just have to burn!”

After burying Juanita, Cooper claimed he took the shovel and grubbing hoe he had used to dig the grave back to the house, stopping along the way at the windmill to wash the blood from his hands. He then discovered he forgot to put Juanita’s jacket and purse in the grave with her, so he buried them somewhere between his house and the grave, those two items were never recovered.

Next, Cooper stated, he dropped the wine bottle in the water barrel to remove the blood then he went home and removed all his blood-soaked clothing, rolling them into a bundle that he hid under his kitchen cabinet. He then made a lot of noise, pretending as he had just gotten out of bed, put on clean clothes, and went to fetch the milk. After separating the milk, he stated he went back to the grave where he discovered blood-soaked dirt which he scooped up and placed in a gunny sack and hid behind the barn. Later he soaked the gunny sack in oil and burned it.

He then went back to his house to remove his bloody clothing, but all he could get from under the cabinet was his shirt before his wife came in. He told her he had been in a fight and that was where the blood came from. He took the shirt outside and burned it then threw the

grubbing hoe head into Asa Smith's yard and dropped the handle in the brush. Cooper's wife later found the rest of the clothing he had hidden under the cabinet, and he told her it was also from the fight.

When asked what happened to Juanita's skirt, which was missing from the grave, Cooper replied, "I had to hide her skirt twice, once an automobile came along as I was burying it in a ditch, and I had to grab it up quick and run. Later I buried it in the road then ran my car over it several times to pack the earth down so it wouldn't show. That's all I know, now let me have some rest." Cooper seemed to have lived in a mental hell following Juanita's murder, torn between horror and fear, spending the days before confessing the location of her body returning to the grave to make sure she was still in it and moving the skirt and knife out fear they would be found.

Sheriff Abel stood up and looked at Deputy Bedford and told him, "We're going back, bring him along." For the second time that day, Cooper was driven back to Cochran County. In the car Sheriff Abel said, "We've quit fooling now, Cooper, you're going to take us to the places where you buried those things and you're going to dig up every last one."

Two and a half miles from the dance hall Cooper told them to stop, where they got out while Cooper searched for a few seconds in the brush, and came back with a heavy, studded wine bottle which he handed to the sheriff. "Here, I washed it several times, there won't be any prints but mine on it." Cooper had thrown the blood-stained shovel handle in the brush with the bottle but was unable to find it. Juanita's skirt was dug up from a rut in a road two miles from Cooper's home.



Sheriff Able holds Miss Kelly's skirt after it is unearthed.

Photo credit: Gordon Webb. Image courtesy Texas' Last Frontier Historical Museum.

Cooper then directed the men to his mother-in-law, Addie Spickard's home. A hundred yards from her house Cooper asked them to stop, stating he didn't want to get his family all stirred up. He led them to the chicken coop, where he dug up a white-handled two-bladed pocketknife which he gave to the sheriff, and said "That's what he killed her with. It's been

boiled and washed.” Cooper looked for his pants in the cottonseed bin before remembering he had asked his wife to burn them. He called her out of the house and asked if she burned them, to which she stated “No, I got the pants and that other thing and buried them under the floor of the outhouse.” A few minutes of digging revealed Cooper’s pants, which had been washed, and a seat canvas seat cover stiff with dried blood. The grubbing hoe handle was recovered from the brush near the Smith farm, where Cooper had planted the bloody grubbing hoe head.



Top to bottom: the studded wine bottle used to hit Miss Kelly in the head; Grubbing hoe handle; Cooper’s Pants and shirt (top of pants, left side) worn the night of the murder. Pocket knife (on top of pants, right side) used to cut Miss Kelly’s throat. Image courtesy Texas’ Last Frontier Historical Museum

The men returned with Cooper to Lubbock, stopping along the way for food and coffee. Sheriff Crockett, Deputy House, Blair, and Burks were waiting for them in Sheriff Abel’s office when they returned to continue the questioning. Thirty-six hours of continuous interrogation had passed. Blair spoke to Cooper, “Sheriff Abel told us about the things you’ve dug up. I’ve looked them over carefully; we’ve been over the ground carefully. There’s no physical evidence of anyone being in that field but you and Juanita. The story about the two me who killed her don’t wash. I think it’s time you confessed.” Cooper threw himself back in the chair, his eyes closed, and hands hanging limply at his side, and said “I can’t go any further. If you fellows let me sleep, I’ll tell you the whole truth and finish this up in the morning. You won’t have any more to ask then.” Blair nodded and Cooper was turned over to Deputy Parum Posey with orders to put him in the hospital ward and make him comfortable for the night. He was the only prisoner in the ward.

While Sheriff Abel was questioning Cooper, Sheriff Crockett and Deputy House had been busy examining evidence. Cooper’s small coupe had been hauled in for examination, the inside of the car was splattered with blood. They further tracked the faint tires marks and peg heel shoe trail that zig-zagged the lane near Cooper’s house. A car had pursued the woman,

crossing the sudan rows, turning from one side to the other as she tried desperately to escape before it shows the woman fell to ground before being brutally attacked. There was no evidence that definitely linked Cooper's car or Juanita's footprints to the ones made in the field. The tire tracks were exactly the size as the tracks made by Cooper's coupe, but there were no tread marks that could be seen in the sandy soil.

The morning of Wednesday, October 28th, Deputy Posey went to feed Cooper only to discover Cooper, dressed only in his long underwear, crumpled on the floor between the bed and the wall in a pool of congealed blood. His left hand laid in the pool of blood, and his left foot and leg were drawn up beneath his torso, his head and neck not visible. Blood spurts more than five feet high were seen on the white walls. His right shoe lay on the bed. A razor blade lay beside his foot.

Around midnight, nearly the exact hour of Juanita Kelly's murder, it is believed Cooper removed a razor blade from in between the soles of his shoe and slashed open a two-inch gash on the inside of his left arm, just above the elbow, severing the artery. He sat on the bed until blood loss weakened him and he toppled over. His death was ruled a suicide. Cooper left no note and never admitted guilt.

In an explanation from Cooper's widow, Lois, the mystery of how Cooper obtained the blade was solved. She stated that on Monday, before driving into Morton to inform officials of the location of Juanita's body, Cooper had slit the stitching holding the two soles of his right shoe and inserted the razor blade. She went on to say she appreciated the way her husband had been treated by members of the sheriff's office both in Cochran County and in Lubbock and that she was satisfied with the efforts they had made to ensure he had no weapon in his possession while he was in custody and that she had not informed anyone after seeing her husband hide the blade in his shoe. Examination of the shoe did not show readily that the stitches had been cut and the two soles fit together tightly.



Headline from the Thursday, October 29, 1936 Lubbock Morning Avalanche

Two days later, on October 30th, Sheriff Crockett and Sam Fort announced new evidence by an out-of-state investigator had been found that indicated more than one person was involved in Juanita Kelly's death. Part of the evidence discovered by the investigator included "men's footprints with a very distinguishable sole found on only one brand of shoes" that had been overlooked. Another piece of evidence uncovered by the investigator was soil that had been hidden that didn't match soil on or anywhere near the Cooper farm. Sheriff Crockett stated "most of the information is not suitable for print, but neither Mr. Fort nor I believe this case has come to light in its entirety."

In a letter to Juanita's parents, professing his undying affection, her fiancé in Clovis wrote how his happiness had been severed simultaneously with her life. "We had planned great things together" he penned.

No further information regarding this new evidence ever came to light and no new suspects were ever named. To many, Cooper's suicide was his confession, the actions of a man with a guilty conscience and a heavy heart filled with remorse.

Cooper was laid to rest in Morton Memorial Cemetery on Thursday, October 29, 1936, a short distance from Juanita Kelly.

The story of Juanita Kelly's murder was followed in newspapers across the state and the country.



Odus Cooper & Juanita Kelly's grave stones  
Images courtesy Mary Helen McKnight

Sources:

1937 Interview of J. S. Crockett by Jesse Simmons

1937 Interview of J. S. Crockett and Tom Abel by Margie Harris

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