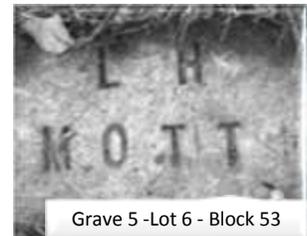


Leah H. Smith Strothman Mott *(1861-1903)*



Local businessman's wife who was murdered by her husband. Together the Motts built a successful laundry business. The success of the business led to the alcohol and drug addiction of Mr. Mott. This ultimately led to the tragic murder of a woman and the orphaning of four children with their father hanged for his crime.

- **1861-Birth.** Leah was born in 1861 in Iowa to Joseph and Adelaide E. Smith. She had eight brothers and sisters.
- **1870-Iowa.** Leah's family moved to Pleasant Grove, Iowa. Joseph was a farmer, and his farm was valued at \$2,500 with \$580 worth of personal property. That was about an average size for a farm in that area at that time.
- **1877-Marriage.** At 16 years old, Leah married William Strothman on February 6, 1877. William was the son of Prussian immigrants Henry and Christiana Strothman. Leah and William would have two sons: Henry (1877) and Oscar (1880). The young family lived with William's parents where he worked as a laborer on the farm.
- **1885-Westward.** It is unknown if the Strothman marriage ended in divorce or the death of William. Leah and her sons moved westward to Whitman, Washington in Walla Walla County.
- **1888-Married.** Leah married her second husband Louis Henry Mott in Seattle, Washington. The Motts moved to Missoula, Montana where they had two daughters: Alice (1893) and Ethel (1898).
- **Debt.** The laundry was in Leah's name and held a \$1,400 mortgage. Leah unsuccessfully attempted numerous times to have Louis admitted to a hospital for treatment of his illness.
- **Sale of business.** During one of Louis' prolonged absences (rumored to be a run from creditors), Leah sold the laundry to Jones Brothers of Spokane, Washington.
- **1903-Shooting death.** On Sunday, January 4, 1903 the family had their noon meal at their home above the laundry. The group included the new owners of the laundry and their cook. After the meal, Louis had continued to complain about the sale of the laundry. He sent their two daughters to another room. Leah decided to leave the house, and as she went down the steps, Louis shot her four times in the back. She fell to the bottom of the stairs. Two policemen were nearby, and came to the scene, where they took Louis into custody and removed him to the jail. Leah was taken to the Sisters' Hospital. She was interviewed and named her husband as her attacker, saying that he was under the influence of drugs and liquor. Leah died a few hours later. Prior to her death, she testified to the circumstances and named her husband as the shooter. She requested her young daughters be looked after. Ethel was one year old and placed with a well-to-do family in Missoula, Montana. Alice was nine years old and sent to live with Leah's sister, Anne Cardwell in Denver, Colorado. Her sons, Henry and Oscar, were adults.
- Leah was buried in a family lot where eventually a son, daughter-in-law, and a grandchild were buried.



Louis Henry Mott (1855-1904)

A successful laundryman whose love of alcohol and morphine led to the murder of his wife followed by Louis' public trial and ultimate hanging.

- **1855-Birth.** Louis Henry Mott was probably born in Indiana, to Dr. Francis Asbury Mott (1814-1855) and Fidelia C. Browning (1826-c1861). He was raised by his uncle Lamoine Mott, a successful miller in Des Moines, Iowa.
- **1879-California.** Louis went west against his family's wishes to Oakland, California, where he worked as a laundryman – the career he held the remainder of his life. During his time in California, he spent 11 months in San Quentin for grand larceny.
- **1866-Montana.** Under the alias of L. H. Browning (his mother's maiden name), Louis started then sold a laundry in Miles City, Montana. Later in the year he started a laundry at Gardner, Montana near Mammoth Hot Springs at Yellowstone. In April 1888 Louis and his wife Leah planned to open a laundry in Fort Benton, Montana. Louise married Leah H. (Smith) Strothman on 17 November 1888 in Seattle, Washington. Leah was divorced and had two sons.
- **1890s–Montana, Idaho and Washington.** Louis and his family lived in the Montana towns of Phillipsburg, Wickes, and Missoula; the Idaho town of Wallace; and the Washington town of Spokane. They operated laundries in each town. During this time, Louis and Leah had two daughters. Louis was described as good to his daughters but not nice to his wife even when sober, and angry and jealous if he was drinking. Louis was described as having a nervous disorder and attempted suicide by overdose at least once. He would disappear from the household and return acting oddly. Leah had the laundry business put in her name.
- **1903-The Murder and Trial.** During one of Louis' absences, Leah sold the business. Louis was very angry and on 4 January 1903 he shot and killed her. He stood trial for the murder, and his attorney attempted to use a defense of insanity. Louis rebelled against this strategy, arguing with the attorneys and his own defense witnesses, saying he'd rather hang than be labelled an imbecile. Louis was convicted and sentenced to hang. His original attorneys resigned and Judge Frank Woody handled his appeals. They requested a new trial based on juror misconduct, saying that two men had preconceived opinions that Louis was guilty and another was drunk during the trial. Both the trial judge and the Supreme Court denied the request. When first arrested, Louis had reached out to his family in Iowa for help. They at first refused to have anything to do with him, but when the appeals were denied, his rich uncle Lamoine came to Montana. The elder Mott met with the governor twice but the governor refused to intervene or commute the sentence.
- **1904-The Hanging.** Sheriff Harry Thompson erected a 14' fence around the yard at the jail and gallows were shipped in from Butte, Montana. Mott was hung on 18 March 1904. At his request, the hanging rope was burned so that it couldn't be used as a souvenir. Although Louise requested to be buried next to Leah, her son Henry refused this request, and Louis is buried near the main entrance to Missoula City Cemetery.
- **Aftermath.** Louis had sent a letter to Senator Joseph Dixon in Washington DC, reminding him of discussions they once had about the afterlife. Louis said he would appear to the senator 48 hours after his death. Senator Dixon reported two days later that Mott did not keep his appointment. Newspapers also reported that Mott had admitted to jailers a connection to a robbery of the Georgetown stage and was implicated in a murder in California. Mott had kept these stories secret for fear they would influence Governor Toole against a reduction of sentence.

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