

## Paul Albro Read (1899-1933)

*The 21<sup>st</sup> Federal Prohibition officer to die from intentional gunshot wounds. Special Agent Read was killed in the line of duty in Missoula, Montana.*

- **1899-Birth.** Paul was born on April 8, 1899 in Hurricane Lake, Pierce County, North Dakota to Edward Delaus and Celia Brager Read. He was the second of thirteen children and the oldest son. Paul's father was an English farmer who also delivered mail in the area around Leeds, North Dakota. In later life, his Norwegian mother would tell her grandchildren about the hungry Indians who would sometimes come to her back door looking for food.
- **Family.** Paul's family was active in the Lutheran church in Leeds, North Dakota. They had first settled in Maine then moved to Minnesota and operated a grist mill before homesteading in North Dakota. Paul's parents managed to scrape together money and purchases musical instruments. The children helped on another learn how to make music. They soon had a family band. Paul could play the pump organ as well as many other instruments.
- **1923-Marriage.** Paul met his wife while on vacation to visit his Uncle Burt in Minnesota. He married Leona Ida Keeney in September 1923 at the Read family farm. Leona was the daughter of a Primitive Baptist preacher. They had two children who died in infancy during an influenza epidemic in 1929: Richard 'Dick' and George. Three children survived him: Katherine (1924), Barbara (1929), and Harry (1932).
- **Personal.** Paul loved camping and hunting. He and Leona spent their honeymoon camping along the Old Yellowstone Trail as they traveled to their new home in Post Falls, Idaho. Leona never knew when Paul would come home with a different car than the one in which he had left home. He loved to "dicker" and regularly took advantage of the sale of confiscated vehicles the government sold. One such time he came home with a large touring car complete with extra rows of seats and a vase for flowers in a let-down shelf on the back of a seat. Unbeknownst to Paul, the shelf also contained a make-up kit. Leona was horrified when the family arrived at church to find the two girls in the back seat with smeared rouge and lipstick all over their faces.
- **Faith.** Paul was an active member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Missoula, MT. For several years before his death he took his big touring car to East Missoula each Sunday. There he would load as many children as would fit into the car to take them to church for Sunday school.
- **Musician.** Paul was an accomplished musician and could play many instruments. During the years of the depression entertainment was often of the home-made variety.



On summer evenings Paul and his neighbors sat on their front porches. Paul would play his accordion or guitar

welcoming requests for favorite tunes from those living close by. Voices from all sides of the street sang along to the tunes.

- **Neighbor.** During the depression years, Paul often brought unexpected guests home for a meal. When Paul's duties involved the arrest of a young bootlegger who had a wife and family to support, he and Leona would deliver groceries to the family's isolated home. Paul had to be assured the family could

survive while the man served his jail sentence. Paul also brought bring people home with him rather than leave them stranded along the highway.

- **Career.** Read began his law enforcement career as a deputy sheriff in Wallace, Idaho. He also served as a traffic cop throughout the area between Coeur d'Alene, Idaho and the Washington state border. Read



*Time for Sunday school. The car had only three rows of seats but, by the grace of God, everyone was squeezed in. Photo: Courtesy of Katherine Read Baeth, from the Missoulian*

entered the prohibition service in 1925. His work encompassed the area between the Idaho border and Canada in western Montana. Much of the time his work entailed camping out while he searched for stills in isolated areas of the countryside.



**\*\*Note: The following information is public record. The reporting sources show conflicting events for what unfolded that night. Read was known not to carry his gun on his person. He normally left his gun locked in the glove box of his vehicle. The night of his murder, investigating officers found Read's gun covered by clothing and other articles in his vehicle parked in front of the Palace Hotel, two blocks away from the scene of the shooting. The only weapon found on the scene was the one used by Cates. A gallon of moonshine whiskey was removed from Cates' car. The convicted murderer, William Clarence Cates, maintained throughout his trial that he shot in self-defense. Cates is buried at St. Mary's Cemetery in Missoula, Montana.**

- **United States Department of Justice: The Officer Down Memorial Pages**

*"Special Agent Read was shot and killed in the line of duty in Missoula Montana. He had gone to a location after receiving a tip that a bar at the corner of Broadway and Higgins was serving illegal alcohol during prohibition. He entered the bar and purchased a beer. After being served he arrested the proprietor. Special Agent Read had locked his service weapon in the glove box prior to entering the bar and did not search or handcuff the suspect before placing him in his vehicle for the trip to the county jail. As they pulled up to the jail the suspect pulled out a concealed revolver and shot Agent Read three times."*

- **William Clarence Cates.** Cates was previously convicted under state and federal liquor laws as a bootlegger. He had become a well-known sworn enemy of all prohibition officers. This is his account as reported in questioning by Sheriff J. R. Thompson, court records during his trial and subsequent hearings, and in his lone interview with journalist Dean Jones of the Missoulian:

*"On the night of July 21, 1933, he was called from his home to deliver a gallon of moonshine, supposedly to a regular customer, but in reality to a prohibition officer, Paul Read. As he stopped his car in an alley behind the old Oxford, Federal Agent Read stepped on the running board, looked at the whiskey and told Cates he was under arrest. While Read stood on the running boards, Cates stated Read poked a gun in his face and told Cates to drive where he was told. Cates drove Read to the courthouse and a few feet from the driveway to the jail. Cates refused to be arrested and taken into the jail. Read reached for the keys to the ignition and the first shot rang out. During his trial, Cates stated he shot in self-defense. "It was either him or me." Cates also made numerous allegations that Read was in regular dealings with the moonshiners and received a take to allow the operation to continue. Cates stated he "hated to be double crossed."*

- **Paul Read's testimonial on his deathbed.** In semi-consciousness at the hospital, Paul Read attempted to tell officers about the shooting but was unable to do so fully before succumbing to his wounds.

*"Read stated he had just arrested Cates for violation of the liquor laws. Read said the only item he was carrying that night was a flashlight. He stated his gun was locked in the glove box of his vehicle. Read stated he didn't think Cates had the nerve to shoot him."*

- **Constable L. F. Harlow - The Witness.** Constable L. F. Harlow viewed the scene from his front porch on Woody St.

*"The car turned onto Woody Street from West Broadway and stopped in the middle of the street in front of the courthouse. Read and the other man talked for a minute or two and as Read was getting out of the car two shots were fired. Read went behind the car, apparently for protection, and the man (Cates) got out on the left side and went after him. Paul started running towards the courthouse over the lawn and three more shots were fired. He yelled and dropped on the lawn."*

- **Sentencing.** Cates always maintained self-defense and that Read regularly received bribes. Neither of these statements could be proven. Three different Montana governors became involved in the case during a series of nine stays of execution. The case was prolonged until 1937 when at that time Cates was convicted and sent to the Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge, Montana. He was paroled in 1957. William Clarence Cates lived the rest of his life in Missoula and worked as a cabinet maker. He died on March 29, 1972 and was buried in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery in Missoula, Montana. His death certificate notes he was divorced and the burial informant was listed as Missoula County Welfare.

- **1933-Death.** Paul died on July 12, 1933 from gunshot wounds in Missoula, Montana and was buried next to his two infant sons. He was the 21<sup>st</sup> Federal Prohibition officer to die in the line of duty from intentional gunshot wounds.

*Personal information provided by daughter, Kitty Read Baeth. Testimonial information provided by newspaper clippings and law enforcement notes. William Cates information provided by newspaper clippings, cemetery records, and death certificate.*