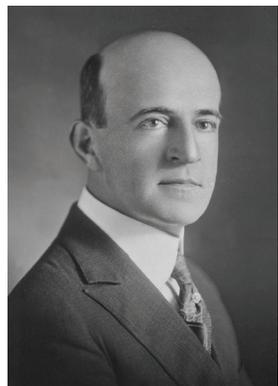


# L.A. SHERIFFS' MUSEUM

By Chris Miller and Mike Fratantoni  
Los Angeles Sheriffs' Museum

## WILLIAM HICKMAN: THE FOX

William Hickman was 19 years old in 1927 when he began working as an assistant cashier at the First National Bank in Los Angeles. Taking advantage of his position, the young man stole several checks with a combined value of \$400 and forged them. When Bank President Perry Parker discovered the missing money, he fired Hickman and reported the crime to



Perry Parker

the Los Angeles Police Department. Hickman was arrested and prosecuted. Parker testified at the trial, and his former employee was convicted. After spending six months in the Hall of Justice Jail, William took

a path of revenge to not only make Perry Parker pay for sending him to jail, but to get back the money from the botched forgery.

During his tenure as a cashier, Hickman learned that the bank president had a daughter. Actually, Parker had 12-year-old twin daughters, whose names were Marion and Marjorie. Blaming his ex-boss for sending him to jail, Hickman decided to retaliate by kidnapping Parker's daughter and then demanding ransom for her safe return.

On December 15, 1927, Hickman went to the administration office of Mount Vernon Junior High in Los Angeles, the school attended by Parker's daughters. Mary Holt, the registrar, greeted Hickman, noticing that he was nicely dressed and well spoken, which aided his credibility. William explained that he worked for the First National Bank and that the president, Perry Parker, had been involved in a traffic accident and wanted his daughter to be by his side. The registrar, who was not familiar with the twins, called the classroom and asked that the Parker child report to the office. The teacher, confused that the request had not been for both girls, voiced her concerns to the registrar. When asked which one he wanted, Hickman, not knowing either of the girls' names, simply said, "the smaller one." Unfortunately, it was not until she was to be picked up from school that anyone realized Marion was missing.



Marion Parker

The family received two handwritten notes from the kidnapper. The first one warned them to expect further information on paying the ransom and that their daughter's life hung by a thread. The second telegram told Perry Parker to obtain \$1,500 in \$20 gold certificates and prepare to deliver them that night.

On the night of December 16, Hickman called Parker, instructing him to meet to exchange the ransom for Marion. He threatened Parker that if he notified police, the girl would die. However, as the kidnapper was en route to the location, he saw police in the area, changed his mind and drove away.

The next day, Parker received a third note, chastising him for failing to make the exchange. Each of the three notes Hickman sent was signed with a different name. The names he used were "Fate," "Death" and "The Fox." "The Fox" was picked up by the news media and used to describe him in future articles.

Hickman had Marion write a letter beseeching her parents to bring the ransom. At the end of the note she wrote, "Please, Daddy, I want to come home tonight."

Prior to picking up the ransom, Hickman stole a car to prevent police from tracking him down if Parker happened to obtain the vehicle's license plate number. Originally, he had no intention of killing Marion, but now that she knew his identity, he felt he had no choice. So hours before the exchange was to take place, Hickman cut Marion's throat and then strangled



Marion's arms and legs, wrapped in newspaper, were found in Elysian Park.

her. He then cut off her arms and legs to dispose of the body. Belatedly realizing that Parker was going to want to see his daughter before paying the ransom, Hickman attempted to make her appear alive. Using piano wire to hold her eyes open and covering her with clothes, he propped the mutilated body in the seat next to him.

Hickman met Parker at Fifth Avenue and South Manhattan Street in Los Angeles at 7:30 p.m. on December 17. To keep from being recognized, the former clerk wore a hat and covered his face with a handkerchief. Pulling alongside the bank president's car, he pointed a gun and said, "You know what I'm here for, no monkey business."

When Parker asked to see his little girl, she didn't respond, and he thought perhaps she had been chloroformed. After receiving the \$1,500 in ransom money, Hickman sped off down the street, throwing the body to the curb. Parker immediately drove up and jumped out to retrieve his daughter. Words cannot describe the gut-wrenching scream as this father picked up his child's dismembered torso.

On December 18, investigators found Marion's arms and legs wrapped in newspaper on the side of the road in Elysian Park. Today, this would be the back road to Dodger Stadium. During the autopsy, the laundry mark "Bellview Apartments" was found embroidered on a towel used to conceal Marion's torso. This led investigators to Hickman's apartment, but he slipped past them.

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*Crowd waiting to see Hickman at the Glendale train station*

LAPD recovered the stolen vehicle that was used to pick up the ransom money and had it fingerprinted. Due to his prior criminal conviction, the police were able to match fingerprints from the getaway car and ransom notes to Hickman, making this one of the early cases where a killer was identified by his fingerprints.

Everyone was outraged after Marion's arms and legs were found. Hundreds of officers and thousands of citizens searched for the girl's killer. Mob bosses Albert Marco and Tony "The Hat" Panero suspended all bootlegging and offered their soldiers \$25,000 for anyone who brought Hickman to them.

An all-points bulletin was issued for Hickman, and the reward for his capture reached \$100,000. A week after the tragedy, Officers Tom Gurdane and Buck Lieuallen in Echo, Oregon, recognized Hickman and arrested him. In those days, police could receive the rewards offered for wanted suspects. The law changed after that and law enforcement officers could no longer collect rewards.

During that time, in order to save on resources and cost, the County Homicide Squad was formed. Investigators from the LAPD, L.A. Sheriff's Department and D.A.'s Office collaborated together on all major cases. The investigators from LAPD who worked on the Hickman case were Harry Raymond, Dick Lucas and Dwight Longuevan. The Sheriff's Department investigators were Al Manning, Al Guasti, Frank Dewar, Burt Amstein, Claude Peters and Norris Stensland, while Investigator George Contreras represented the D.A.'s Office.

A contingent of investigators from both the

LAPD and Sheriff's Department traveled by train to Oregon to transport Hickman back to Los Angeles. LAPD Investigators Dick Lucas and Harry Raymond were accompanied by Norris Stensland and Burt Amstein from the Sheriff's Department. LAPD Chief Davis also joined the group. On the train ride back to Los Angeles, Hickman signed a confession admitting to the killing and dismembering of Marion Parker.



*Hickman's mugshot*

Many of the passengers recognized Hickman from his picture on the front page of the newspapers and threatened to lynch him. The men escorting Hickman decided it would be safer to remove him from the train and transport him by car back to L.A., but even then, when Hickman arrived in Los Angeles, a large, furious crowd was waiting for him outside the Hall of Justice.

Although Undersheriff Biscailuz was worried that angry mobs might lynch his prisoner as the Sheriff's Department attempted to bring Hickman into the Hall of Justice Jail, Biscailuz was even more concerned about what his deputies would do to the child killer. So, for the suspect's own safety, he was transported and held at his



*Deputies with Hickman*

defense attorney's office, where he was guarded by two homicide investigators.

Meanwhile, thousands of people gathered outside the Hall of Justice, screaming, "Lynch him! Lynch him!" The chief jailer decided that the best way to appease the hostile group was to allow their leader to see the jail. After inspecting the cells, the leader announced that Hickman was not there, and the crowd finally dispersed.

Hickman was eventually moved to the Hall of Justice Jail, where he told deputies that he would take investigators to the house where he had held Marion Parker. It was soon discovered, however, that during the trip to view the scene



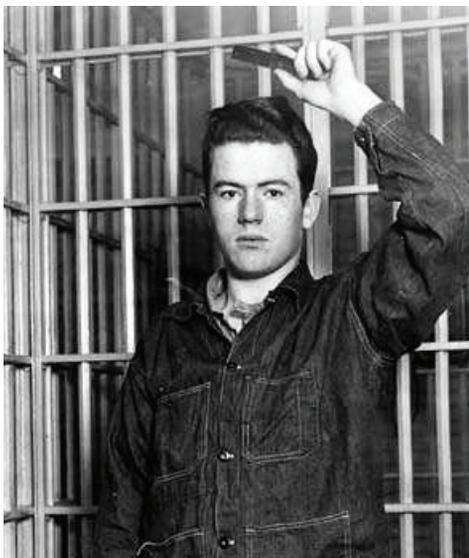
*Hickman with Undersheriff Biscailuz*



Hickman in court



Hickman was hanged on October 19, 1928.



Hickman in jail

Hickman planned to take one of the deputies' guns and shoot it out with other deputies before he escaped. He was never taken out of the jail.

Going on trial in January 1928, Hickman decided to try a new defense, involving a law that was passed just the year before, allowing a defendant to plead not guilty by reason of insanity. If found to be insane, he would not be held responsible for his crime. Viewing this as his only chance of getting away with murder, Hickman told his attorney that a supernatural being named Providence had ordered him to kill Marion. This was one of the first insanity pleas on behalf of an accused killer in California. The jailer who handled Hickman while he was in custody in Oregon was brought to Los Angeles to testify. He stated that Hickman had

told him of his plan to use the insanity defense and wanted to know how a crazy person acts.

Several psychologists, known as alienists at that time, found that Hickman was sane. The defense put Hickman's mother on the stand, where she told the court that insanity ran in her family.

Hickman's insanity defense was unsuccessful, and he was convicted of kidnapping and murder. He never expressed remorse for killing Marion and was hanged at the gallows at San Quentin on October 19, 1928.

Recently, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Museum purchased the Watson Family Collection. The Watson family spanned three generations of photographers all the way

through 1970, beginning with their grandfather in 1917. Grandfather Watson was the first staff photographer for the *L.A. Times* and was also a contract photographer for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, recording homicides, vice and major disasters. The pictures in this collection document all of the major crimes, incidents and disasters during that time period.

George Watson was the official photographer on the Hickman case, and included among the material purchased by the Museum was an audio interview in which Watson recounted the hanging of William Hickman. He explained that in order to protect the prison guards from having to live with the emotional aftermath of being the one who pulled the rope that killed Hickman, three guards pulled ropes simultaneously. Two of the ropes were attached to weights, while one released the trap door.

As it turned out, the rope used was cut too short, causing the drop to be insufficient for the abrupt stop needed to cause the breaking of the condemned man's neck and his immediate death. Exacerbating the situation, Hickman's leg got caught on the trapdoor of the gallows. Instead of an instant and virtually painless demise, William Hickman's last, vain struggle for life lasted 20 minutes before the doctor lowered his stethoscope, finally announcing that the killer's heart was no longer beating. Watson said it was just like watching someone being murdered and, even though the man deserved his fate, the scene was still excruciating. So, 10 months after executing 12-year-old Marion Parker, William Hickman was, himself, executed. ☆



George Watson, 1917