

The Myriad Ministries of Local Pastor L.D. Cook

The editor was first drawn to Lovillo D. Cook by the following 1905 front-page article¹ in the *New York Times*.

DEATH THREAT FOR PASTOR.

Secret Enemies Stone Him, Poison His
Horse, and Burn His Home.

Special to The New York Times.

WILLIAMSPORT, Penn., Feb. 4.—The Rev. L. D. Cook, pastor of the Methodist Church at Black Creek, near here, is the victim of a band of secret enemies who have poisoned his horse, burned his home, threatened his life, and those of five members of his official board. He has been warned that unless he leaves the town his life will pay the forfeit. But Mr. Cook declares that he will remain where he is.

The motive of the enemies of the preacher is not known. Mr. Cook was appointed to the church in October, 1903, and three months later his home was burned while the family were away. A few days ago Mr. Cook received an anonymous note which read: "We have burned your house and can do it again. We will give you thirty days to leave this place, and if you do not your life will be the penalty."

Since the notes were received Mr. Cook's driving horse died from poisoning, and it has been found that Paris green was placed in the animal's feed box. This week, while conducting revival services with the Rev. Mr. Roberts, Mr. Cook was struck by a stone which came crashing through a window of the church. The parsonage is now being guarded night and day by armed men, and the preacher carries arms.

¹ New York Times, February 5, 1905, page 1.

While the article apparently originated in Williamsport PA and the incident is described as occurring “near here,” Black Creek is actually in Allegany County NY, about 40 miles north of Coudersport PA. At that time, the entire area was served by the Genesee Conference, and L.D. Cook had begun his ministry a few years earlier at North Fork PA, which is now within the boundaries of the Susquehanna Conference. Cook went on to serve in a variety of significant and interesting ways, always as a local pastor, in several Methodist conferences and states across the country. As he was never an ordained itinerant, his amazing story has stayed beneath the radar of conventional Methodist history and has not been easy to reconstruct. *The Chronicle* considers it a privilege to present for the first time a unified account of the myriad ministries of Lovillo D. Cook.

Prologue

The earliest record of any kind of Lovillo Cook seems to be his appearance in the 1892 New York state census listing him as a 15 year old male living in Esperance, Schoharie County NY. Unfortunately, his parents cannot be determined with certainty from that census. Lovillo D. Cook² first appears in the records of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1899 journal of the Genesee Conference when he was assigned³ to the Corning District’s appointment at North Fork in Potter County PA.

Pennsylvania (1899-1901)

L.D. Cook was appointed to North Fork in 1899. The Methodist class in North Fork had been formed in 1855 and had erected a church building in 1856.⁴ In 1899 the charge reported 1 church building, a membership of 50, and no parsonage. In 1900, Cook was appointed to both North Fork and nearby Towlesville, in Steuben County NY. North Fork had 49 members, while the Towlesville appointment included 2 church buildings, a membership of 68 and a parsonage. The 1900 census⁵ places Lovilla and his wife Sophia E. Cook in Harrison township, Potter County PA. In 1901 Cook and his wife moved into the

² Lovillo D. Cook (1877-1930) should not be confused with Lyman D. Cook (1847-1926) of the Troy Conference. Both preachers were commonly designated Rev. L.D. Cook and they both served in New York state in the early 1900’s.

³ *Genesee Conference Official Minutes*, 1899, page 25. He is listed on page 20 as a being a licensed local pastor, but there are no records as to exactly when he first received his license, which local charge recommended him for the license, or his original home congregation. His name does not appear in any context in any earlier journal of the Genesee Conference.

⁴ The Methodist building at North Fork was one of the first church structures in Potter County, the 1850 Presbyterian building in Coudersport being one of the few that predates it.

⁵ That census also indicates that Lovillo and Sophia were married in 1900 and that Sophia was born in September 1881. Later records give Mrs. Cook’s maiden name as Snyder and state that she and her parents were born in Pennsylvania – and that Lovillo and his parents were born in New York. The names of neither set of parents can be positively confirmed.

parsonage at Towlesville. Due to ill health, Cook was unable to complete the 1900-01 conference year.⁶

It was during that conference year, after Cook had resigned from the North Fork and Towlesville appointment, that his daughter Marguirete was born on August 4, 1901 – and this information, taken from the tombstone⁷ of Marguirete provides the earliest documentation of any family of Rev. Cook.

The North Fork appointment moved from the Genesee to the Central Pennsylvania Conference in 1962 when those ecclesiastical boundaries were adjusted to coincide with the state line. At that time it was part of the two-point North Fork and Brookfield charge. While Brookfield is still part of the Susquehanna Conference, the North Fork congregation gradually dwindled away. By the summer of 1994, it became evident that the few remaining members could no longer keep the church going. The church officially ceased to exist as of September 1, 1994, and the building is now a private residence.

New York (1901-1905)

The Genesee Conference journals list L.D. Cook as a local pastor without appointment living in Towlesville⁸ in 1901 and Rawson in 1902. Even though he had no appointment, Cook continued to minister as the opportunities arose. In April 1902, for example, one Allegany County paper reported that “Rev. L.D. Cook went to Lima today to assist Rev. H.A. Brockway in a two weeks revival at his charge in Hemlock.”⁹

Rawson, in Allegany County, was within the Olean District of the Genesee Conference, and so Cook came under the attention of that district superintendent and was appointed in 1903 to Black Creek and Abbott’s. This was an appointment about 10 miles from Rawson with 79 members, two church buildings, and no parsonage. In 1904, when Cook was reappointed to the charge, the journal reports that there was now a parsonage.¹⁰ It was during this 1904-05 conference year, that February 1905 the deaths threats occurred.

⁶ *The Christian Advocate*, January 17, 1901, page 104, reports in the Genesee Conference news that “The Rev. L.D. Cook, who was supplying the church at Towlesville NY, owing to ill health, has been obliged to give up the work, and has been succeeded by the Rev. J.W. Brown.”

⁷ This tombstone is in the Union Cemetery at Osnabrook, Cavalier County ND and may be viewed at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/19994953/mary-marguirette-cook>.

⁸ The 1901 journal of the Genesee Conference, page 68, states that “a cozy little parsonage is being completed” at Towlesville – made possible by a generous bequest. It is possible that the Cook family was permitted to remain in the old parsonage.

⁹ *Rushford Spectator*, April 3, 1902, page 2.

¹⁰ This appears to be an unexpected positive result of the troubles that were beginning on the charge. The 1904 journal, pages 74-75, state: “At Black Creek, while absent from their rented home, pastor L.D. Cook and family lost all their earthly goods, library and all, by fire. The charge had never owned a parsonage. They do now, for Brother Cook’s efforts were successful and a fine new house near the church was bought and paid for worth \$1,000.”

While the only known specifics regarding the incident are those reported in the *New York Times* article, a plausible reconstruction of the details is possible. The later work of Cook, especially in North Dakota, illustrates that he was a committed and uncompromising preacher and evangelist – and it while he was conducting revival services that the persecution seemed to come to a head. The most likely scenario is that either Rev. Cook preached strongly against alcohol and angered those interests within the community or that his evangelistic preaching had offended some who felt threatened by such preaching and/or had converted some (typically women and children) which resulting in the splitting of families and threatening their status quo.

The story appears to have gained wide and sustained attention. Another article¹¹ appearing more than a month after the one in the *New York Times*, this time in Virginia but again with a Williamsport by-line, reported the following developments.

PASTOR ADVISED TO LEAVE

Williamsport, Pa., March 15.—Followed for more than a year by a remorseless persecution, Rev. L. D. Cook, pastor of the Methodist church at Black Creek, just across the New York state line, has left the place. He accepted the advice of the presiding elder, Rev. Thomas Cardus, at the conclusion of a long investigation by detectives, although he had previously declared he would not leave, even though his life paid the forfeit. More than a year ago Mr. Cook's house was burned by secret enemies, then his horse was poisoned. A letter threatened his life and that of his official advisers if he did not leave at once. He was stoned in his pulpit, and after he left his church, at one time being knocked senseless, he was compelled to carry arms to defend himself. Citizens at the village became so wrought up over the matter that a public subscription was taken and detectives employed to discover who the preacher's enemies were and their object. They have just completed their work, but their report is a mystery. The presiding elder has now advised Mr. Cook to leave. Where he is going kept a secret lest his enemies follow him. In a farewell address Mr. Cook said on Sunday evening that after a time he intended to return to Black Creek and stay there, in spite of his persecutors.

The following article¹² gives closure to the case, at least so far as the secular press is concerned.

REV. L. D. COOK OF BLACK CREEK WILL RETURN HOME TO-DAY

Olean, March 23 - Rev. L. D. COOK, the much persecuted pastor of the Methodist Church of Black Creek, will return to his home tomorrow and the presiding elder of the Olean district of the M. E. Church, with whom Mr. Cook visited yesterday quietly, states that he will take charge of his work

¹¹ *Roanoke Times*, March 16, 1905, page 5.

¹² *Rochester NY Union & Advertiser*, March 24, 1905.

at once and that his people are preparing a reception for him on his return, as they voted to do in a recent business meeting.

It is also announced that all detectives will be discharged and matters will take their usual course as if nothing had happened. The District Attorney, in whose hands the matter was placed, has also notified those interested that he has no money with which to take up the case, and so it has been dropped all around.

While Cook returned to finish the 1904-05 conference year, he was not re-appointed to the charge for a third year.¹³ In 1905, Cook was appointed to Mount Alton in McKean County PA, now within the bounds of the Western Pennsylvania Conference, but he prayerfully decided to move west instead. As reported in the Genesee Conference journal,¹⁴ "L.D. Cook appointed to Mt. Alton, shortly after the Conference asked consent to go to North Dakota, where he now has a charge."

North Dakota (1905-1908)

It is not known why the Cooks were drawn to North Dakota, but they very quickly settled in Osnabrook. An undated and unidentified newspaper clipping posted at a family gravesite reads as follows.

Rev. and Mrs. L.D. Cooke [sic] and little girl arrived Saturday from New York and will make their home in Osnabrook. Mr. Cook will have the Methodist charge at this point. They will occupy the Balfour residence in about three weeks.

As reported in the 1906 journal of the North Dakota Conference¹⁵, however, the work at Osnabrook which began with such optimism soon suffered setbacks due to illness and death.

The Rev. C.J. [sic] Cook of New York of New York was induced to take hold of the work at Osnabrook and was on the field pressing the interests of the charge before three weeks of the year had passed. Brother Cook did splendid work and secured splendid results. The work of this charge for a month or two moved along very successfully until sickness visited the pastor's home. His little girl six years of age was taken sick almost immediately upon his arrival at Osnabrook, and after three or four months of suffering, died. Upon the death of the child, Mrs. Cook returned to New York and was taken with typhoid fever. Her parents wrote Mr. Cook that

¹³ This was despite the fact that the charge asked for his return. The 1905 journal, page 87, summarized the matter as follows: "One of our pastors, L.D. Cook, has known the suffering arising from malicious persecution. Financially and physically he has suffered. Most dastardly attempts were made upon his life. This persecution continued for about five months, but through it all this brother has manifested no spirit but that which was in harmony with the highest type of a Christian gentleman and a Christian minister. His devotion and faithfulness are worthy the approval and honor of the Conference. Amid tears of affection, the Quarterly Conference unanimously invited him to return and be their pastor for another year."

¹⁴ *Genesee Conference Official Minutes*, 1906, page 85.

¹⁵ *Minutes of the North Dakota Annual Conference* 1906, pages 42-43.

he must come home and he went at once, thus leaving the charge vacant.¹⁶ Rev. Wallace, a graduate from Boston School of Theology was secured to succeed Brother Cook at Osnabrook and in six months has done a full year's work and done it well. Brother Cook later returned to the state and has supplied the last quarter of the year on the Hunter charge with first class results.

In 1906, Cook continued on the Hunter and Grandin charge and was appointed there for the full year – and again in 1907. His ministry and outreach proved so successful that the charge had to be divided, and the 1908 journal reported the following.¹⁷

About mid-year, Hunter and Grandin circuit was divided. This was made necessary and possible through a request from the people of Arthur to Brother L.D. Cook, our pastor at Hunter, and to the District Superintendent, that we establish our church in that town.

Unfortunately, Cook's health problems returned to the point where he was unable to continue in the charge he had nurtured to the point where it needed to be divided, and two different pastors were appointed in mid-year to supply the divided charge. The 1908 journal reports this development as follows.¹⁸

Brother L.D. Cook of Hunter, because of failing sight, found it necessary to heed medical advice and ask to be released from pastoral duties.

Cook's development of the work in Arthur is also covered by reports in the local newspaper, the *Hunter Herald*. Each issue of that paper included a section headed "Arthur Anglings" that gave the local news for that smaller, nearby community. The following chronological entries in that section give a more complete picture of Cook's outreach and ministry in Arthur.

1/2/08 - Rev. L. D. Cook will hold services at the school house a week from Sunday.

1/16/08 - Rev. Cook will hold regular Sunday services here beginning next Sunday at eleven o'clock in the school house, Sunday school will be held after the services.

2/6/08 - Religious services will be held at the school house next Sunday by Rev. Cook at eleven a. m.

2/20/08 - Rev. and Mrs. Cook, of Hunter, were visitors in Arthur last Wednesday.

3/12/08 - Universal regret is expressed over Rev. Cook's failing eyesight and his resignation from his charge. He is a popular and practical speaker and we trust his successor will be able to fill his place.

3/26/08 - An organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church was effected here last Sunday forenoon with forty-one charter members, thirty-one adults and ten young people. The services which were held at the school house to a large and attentive congregation were conducted by Presiding Elder J. G. Moore, of Grand Forks and Rev. Cook of Hunter. Rev. Moore's text was from the book of Matthew the words of our Lord, "For My Sake," and he brought out the fact eloquently that what one does for love's sake is always well done. Rev. Cook will preach here next Sunday and possibly the

¹⁶ Mrs. Cook covered from the typhoid fever and returned with Rev. Cook to North Dakota.

¹⁷ *Minutes of the North Dakota Annual Conference* 1908, page 31.

¹⁸ *Minutes of the North Dakota Annual Conference* 1908, page 28.

Sunday after. It is deeply regretted that he must give up his ministry here just when the prospects are brightest for establishing the church on a permanent basis. We trust his successor will take up the work so auspiciously begun and carry it on until the vision of a church with its spire pointing heavenward will become a reality.

Washington (1908-20)

By November of 1908 L.D. Cook had moved even further west and was living in the state of Washington, as verified by this newspaper account¹⁹ of the dedication of the church building at Arthur by the district superintendent.

Rev. Moore made an address that, for inspiration and power, has seldom been equaled. He also paid a glowing tribute to the former pastor, Rev. L.D. Cook of Washington, who organized the church. And it was while they were living in Seattle that disappointment struck the family again when, on March 14, 1909, their infant son was stillborn. He is reportedly buried in the Crown Hill Cemetery in Seattle WA.

Despite his continuing issues eyesight and the death of his son, Cook once again stepped up to serve in the ministry as a local preacher, this time in the Puget Sound Conference at the Colby Methodist Episcopal Church in South Colby WA. The printed history of that congregation includes the statement that “The Rev. L.D. Cook has supplied the remainder of the year (April to September, 1909).”²⁰

Cook registered for the draft during WWI and was assigned to Fort Worden²¹, where he appears to have served from 1917-1918.

At this time, the Puget Sound Conference also covered the work in **Alaska**, and the following²² indicates that the Cooks even served for a time in Seward.

REV. COOK IMPROVING

Rev. L.D. Cook of the Methodist Church here is improving in Seattle and expects to be back in Seward again shortly after the first of next month possibly coming North on the Northwestern which sails from Seattle next Thursday. Mrs. Cook received letters in the mail on the Alaska in which Rev. Cook stated that he had already had one operation performed upon one eye and his eyesight was greatly improved.

The family is still in Washington in 1920, and the federal census for that year places them in Grays Harbor County and indicates that they now have a two year old daughter named Jeanette.

¹⁹ *The Fargo Forum*, November 24, 1809, page 1.

²⁰ *Looking Back: History of the Colby United Methodist Church*, 1974, page 3.

²¹ Located in Port Townsend WA, Fort Worden was originally constructed to protect the Puget Sound from invasion by sea. The site was decommissioned in 1953 and its 433 acres are now the Fort Worden Historical State Park.

²² Seward AK *Seward Gateway*, April 25, 1919, page 1.

Oregon (1921-23)

The Cook family continued on the move. Unable to go any farther west, they turned south toward Oregon and California. In 1921, the Portland OR daily paper reported the following.²³

Kalama, Wash., June 27. At a quiet wedding attended only by the family, Robert L. Stevens and Verna Marie Miller were married, by Rev. L. D. Cook of the Methodist Episcopal church, at the home of the bride's parents.

In 1922, L.D. Cook was appointed to supply Myrtle Point in the Southern District of the Oregon Conference.²⁴

California (1923-30)

In 1923 the family continued its southern migration down the west coast and settled in California. Cook immediately made himself available as a supply pastor in the California Conference and served continuously and effectively until his death in 1930. The churches he served are as follows.²⁵

- 1923-25 Pinole-Hercules
- 1925-28 Oakland St. Andrews²⁶ (ending May 1928)
- 1928 Byron (beginning May 1928²⁷)
- 1928-29 Berkley First
- 1929-30 San Francisco Geneva Avenue and Daly City

In addition, the Byron UMC in Byron CA includes L.D. Cook in a list²⁸ of several pastors, without giving specific dates, that served the congregation in the 1920's and 1931, when it was in the Oakland District of the California Conference.

Henry Hoar Frost, superintendent of the San Francisco District, reported the death of Lovillo Cook as follows.²⁹

We are all richer for the memory of Brother L.D. Cook, who has for years served most sacrificially and effectively in our "supply" ministry. He was called to his reward in February from the pastorate of [the] Geneva Avenue and Daly City charge. We all sympathize most deeply with Mrs. Cook and daughter Jeanette in their great loss.

²³ Portland OR *Morning Oregonian*, June 28, 1921, page 10.

²⁴ Portland OR *Morning Oregonian*, September 12, 1922, page 6.

²⁵ *The Chronicle* is grateful for the help and information supplied for this section by Stephen Yale, archivist of the California-Nevada Conference UMC.

²⁶ In 1938, St. Andrew's merged with Fruitdale to become the present Laurel UMC, worshipping at the Kansas Street and Magee Avenue site that had been St. Andrew's. The neighborhood has changed over the years, and the present congregation is Tongan.

²⁷ The California Conference held its annual sessions in September. When the pastor at Bryon died May 4, 1928, Cook was moved to Byron to finish the conference year. Apparently his ability to handle adversity and adapt to new environments made him the right man for the job.

²⁸ <https://www.byronumc.net/about-us/church-history/>

²⁹ *1930 Journal of the California Annual Conference*, pages 357-58.

Lovillo D. Cook (1877-1930) is buried in plot #58 of the Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland CA. While other persons with the Cook surname are buried in the same plot, they appear to be unrelated to Rev. Cook – a local preacher whose motto can truly have been said to be **“Where He Leads Me I Will Follow.”**

Epilogue

The 1930 census reports the widowed Mrs. Cook living as a roomer in San Francisco. Nothing more is known about the fate of Sophia E. (Snyder) Cook and Jeanette. The Service record of Lovillo D. Cook as it appears on the website for the Susquehanna Conference archives is as follows.³⁰

COOK, LOVILLO D.

Born: 5-22-1877

married: Sophia E. Snyder

Died: 2-?-1930

obit: [9/?/1881 – after 1930]

1899 license

1903 ordained deacon, Genesee Conference

Interment: Mountain View Cemetery, Oakland CA

Obit:

1899-00	North Fork PA
1900-01	North Fork PA and Towlesville NY (did not finish the year)
1901-02	living in Towlesville NY
1902-03	living in Rawson NY
1903-05	Black Creek and Abbott's NY
1905	Mount Alton PA (did not report due to moving west)
1905	“transfer” to North Dakota Conference
1905-06	Osnabrook (part year, see 1906 ND Journal, pages 42-43)
1906-08	Hunter and Grandin
	“transfer” to Puget Sound Conference
1909	Colby (April to September)
1919	Seward AK
	“transfer” to Oregon Conference
1922-23	Myrtle Point
	“transfer” to California Conference
1923-25	Pinole-Hercules
1925-28	Oakland St. Andrew's (ending May 1928)
1928	Byron (beginning May 1928)
1928-29	Berkley First
1929-30	San Francisco Geneva Avenue and Daly City

Note: L.D. Cook served as a supply preacher and was never a regular clergy member of any conference in which he served. The 1906 Genesee Conference Journal, page 85, states: “L.D. Cook appointed to Mt. Alton, shortly after the Conference asked consent to go to North Dakota, where he now has a charge.”

³⁰ Go to susumc.org →resources →archives →data bases →pastors →Northern Tier pastors.