

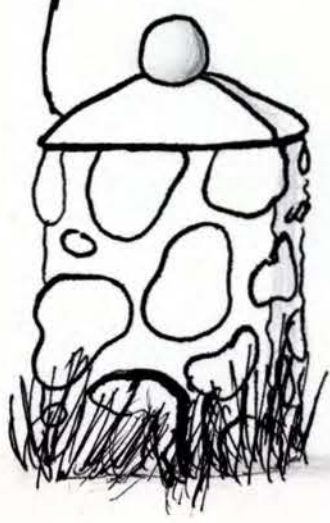
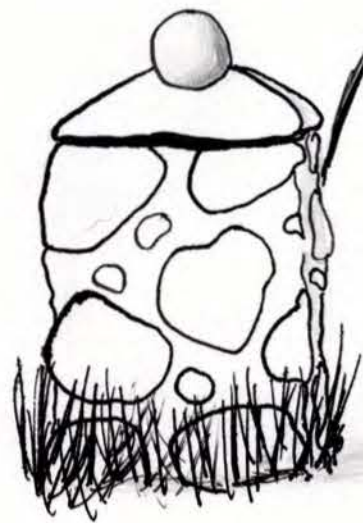


"Oh, for the gate and  
The locust lane

And dusk, and dew,  
And home

Again."

Madison Cawein



**MYSTERIOUS DEATH**

# Decomposed male body unearthed near Dutton

The identity is unknown, but some wonder if it's the body of a man wanted in the shooting death of an Ingersoll police officer.

By Bob Massecar  
The London Free Press

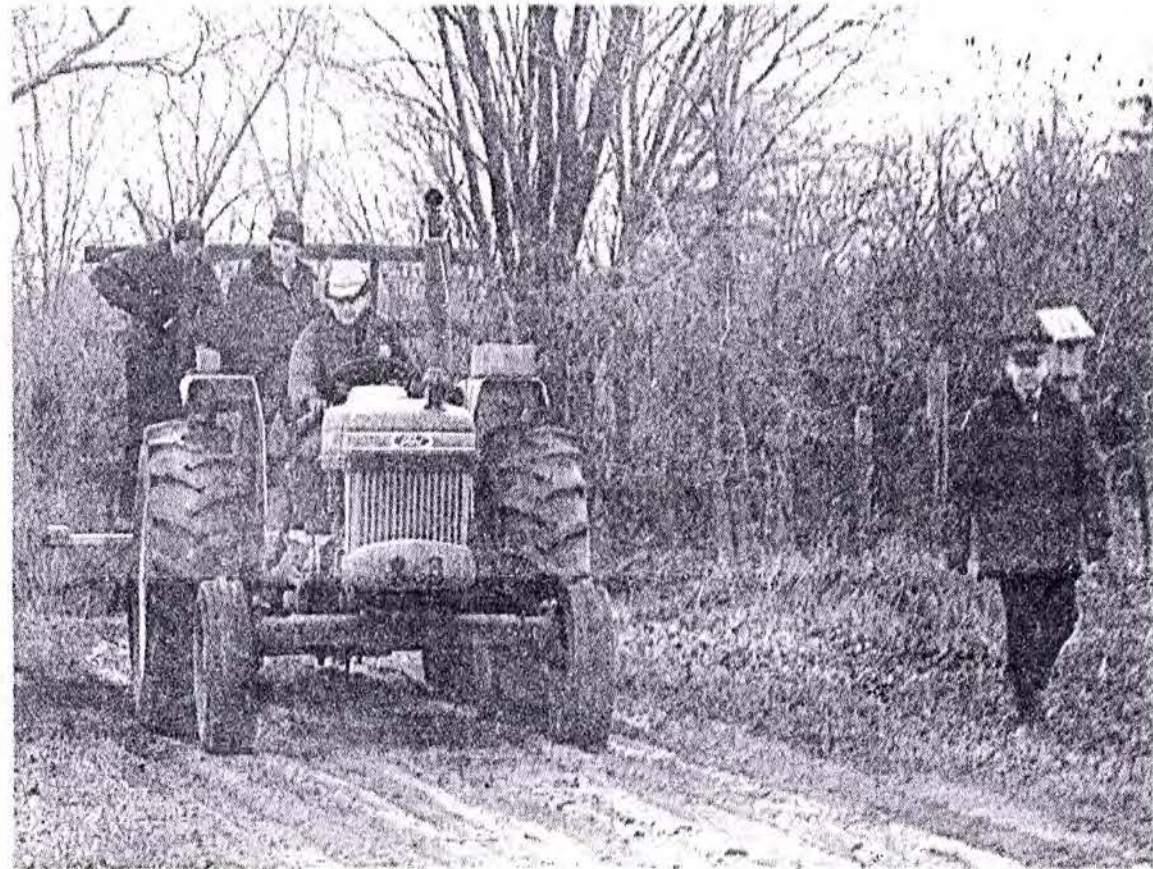
DUTTON — The identity of a badly decomposed male body discovered in a shallow grave near here remained a mystery late Friday as investigators probed the mud for clues.

A special 10-member OPP team, numbed by a damp, cold wind, scoured the crime scene 13 kilometres north of Dutton on the Dunwich Township farm of Duncan McTavish.

The body, which police found about 4 p.m. Thursday, had been buried in a lonely section of the 161-hectare (400-acre) farm about 1.5 kilometres off a little-used country lane, amid dense bush and out of eyesight of passing motorists.

Police used a tractor and farm wagon to get to the scene.

"We're working slowly to try to



Morris Lamont/The London Free Press

Provincial police officers are shuttled by tractor to the area where a male body was found in a section of dense bush 13 kilometres north of Dutton. The tractor was used because the site is not accessible by car. The decomposed body, not yet identified, was found in a shallow grave.

recover any evidence from the scene," said OPP Detective-Sergeant Bernie Crane. He said all information and material would be forwarded to the Centre of Forensic Sciences in Toronto where pathologists are to examine the body.

**POLICE TIPPED:** While police would not indicate how or by whom the body was found, a police source said they received a tip advising them of the grave.

McTavish drove his pickup truck to the roadblock set up by police on the country lane. At the scene, he had few details about the find on his land. "They only told me they had found a body,"

he said.

While police were far from making an identification, it was apparent that in the back of some minds, officers wondered if it could be the body of David O'Neil, wanted for murder in the Sept. 19 killing of Ingersoll police Constable Scott Rossiter.

"It could be O'Neil — but it also could be anybody," said Sergeant John Stephens.

Investigators working on the Rossiter case "are very interested" in learning the identity of the body, said OPP Constable Ray Dobbs who has been acting as police spokesperson in the case.

"We're keeping tabs on what's going on there (at Dutton), but

we're still continuing on our investigation as normal."

O'Neil has been the object of a North America-wide manhunt since Rossiter was shot with his .38-calibre revolver after struggling with a suspect near the Ingersoll police station.

A suspect fled after Rossiter collapsed, vanishing despite widespread searches throughout the area.

O'Neil has been featured in segments of NBC's Unsolved Mysteries, prompting more than 500 calls from persons across Canada and the U.S. who believed they spotted the fugitive. So far, none of the sightings has been confirmed.



The London Free Press

**CRIME**

# Body identified as man sought in police killing

Police say David O'Neil, right, was the victim of a gangland-style execution.

By Bob Masecar and Eric Bender  
The London Free Press

Police ended three days of speculation Sunday night by confirming the decomposed body found in a shallow grave in Dunwich Township, near Dutton, is that of fugitive David Kenneth O'Neil.

O'Neil, sought continent-wide for the Sept. 19 murder of Ingersoll police Constable Scott Rossiter, was killed



gangland-style by multiple gunshot wounds to the head, police said.

The body was identified by dental comparisons, said OPP Detective Sergeant Bernie Crane. The murder of O'Neil is now under investigation by the OPP — but the investigation of the Rossiter slaying is still not closed, he said.

"There are still some areas that need to be followed up."

Crane said Rossiter's service revolver, with which he was killed, has not been found.

Crane refused to speculate on a motive for killing O'Neil and was tight-lipped about details surrounding the O'Neil grave site, in an isolated wood, 13 kilometres north of Dutton, on the farm of Duncan McTavish.

**DODGED THE LAW:** "It looks like a gangland-style execution," one officer said earlier, speculating O'Neil's killers may have tired of hiding him after O'Neil successfully dodged the law in the hours after Rossiter was gunned down near the Ingersoll police station with his .38-calibre police revolver.

Crane said it has not been determined when O'Neil died. Police are hoping forensic experts can narrow the time of death in tests to be conducted this week.

In the meantime, a special OPP team

See **BODY** page A3 ►



## BODY: Identified by OPP as man being sought in police officer's killing

Constable Scott Rossiter was gunned down Sept. 19 near the Ingersoll police station with his .38-calibre police revolver. Rossiter, 30, a native of St. Thomas, was also a resident of the city.



► From page A1

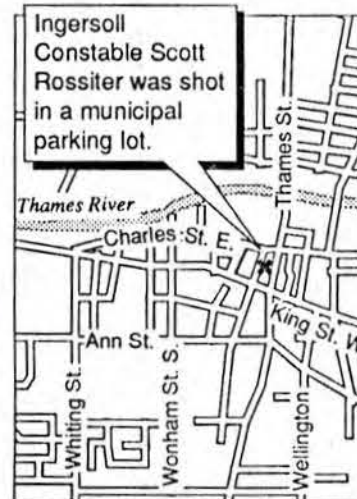
today will begin to sift a roped-off 15-metre (50-foot) area at the grave site on the 160-hectare (400-acre) farm, searching for clues that might lead them to the killers.

Investigators, who were tipped to the grave's location, have been scouring the area about 1.5 kilometres off a little-used country lane in dense bush. They have been hampered in their search by wet and muddy conditions, using a tractor and farm wagon to get to the scene.

O'Neil, 33, of RR 1, Putnam, sparked a massive manhunt across North America that included a feature on NBC's Unsolved Mysteries.

Rossiter, 30, a St. Thomas native, had been on routine patrol in a downtown Ingersoll parking lot Sept. 19 when he stopped a man for a routine check. A struggle broke out and Rossiter was shot in the head. He died in hospital a little more than an hour later.

Ironically, the father of two had moved just 18 months earlier from Peel region where he had been a police officer for seven years, believing Ingersoll would be safer.



### THE HUNT FOR O'NEIL

- **Sept. 19:** Ingersoll Constable Scott Rossiter is shot with his own gun after a late-night scuffle with a man behind the town's police station.
- **Sept. 20:** Rossiter dies in an Ingersoll hospital shortly after midnight. Police launch a Canada-wide search for 33-year-old David O'Neil of the Putnam area. He is described as armed and dangerous. During the next few months, hundreds of tips come in.
- **Sept. 23:** A news report says police are warning O'Neil's "biker friends" — and anybody else — not to hide O'Neil.
- **Sept. 24:** Police release a tape of O'Neil's mother asking him to give himself up. Police issue a computer-enhanced picture of O'Neil without his beard.
- **Oct. 16:** The American crime show Unsolved Mysteries airs a segment on the case. New details about the slaying of Rossiter are revealed. More than 500 calls come in from across Canada and the United States.
- **Nov. 22:** The Unsolved Mysteries show is repeated on Kitchener-Waterloo's CTV affiliate. Eight calls come in.
- **Jan. 9, 1992:** After receiving a tip, OPP find a man's body buried in a shallow grave in an isolated woodlot on a Dunwich Township

# David O'Neil's dad wonders if son's death was revenge

Those who knew O'Neil, right, say he was mild-mannered, honest and a 'nice guy.'

By Pat Currie  
London Free Press



The possibility that David O'Neil was the victim of a revenge killing was raised Tuesday by his father and friends.

"I've been thinking that way," Ken O'Neil of RR 1, Putnam, said of the slaying of his son, whose body was found last Thursday in a shallow grave near Iona Station. An autopsy showed he had been shot three times in the head.

"It was obviously murder," the elder O'Neil said. The question is: Who did it?

"There's always that speculation in a case like this," said Inspector Doug Ormsby, head of OPP's No. 2 District based in London. "It will be investigated like any other shooting. Every effort will be made to find those responsible. Nothing has been ruled out. We'll be looking at every avenue."

David O'Neil was the object of a nationwide search after Ingersoll Constable Scott Rossiter was shot with his own .38-calibre service revolver on the night of Sept. 19. The officer died early the next day.

Commenting on speculation that O'Neil had been harbored, then slain by a motorcycle gang, a female acquaintance who wished to remain anonymous asked: "Why would bikers kill him? Why would they even hide him?"

**FUNERAL THURSDAY:** Several Putnam area people said the David O'Neil they knew was not the drug-using petty criminal portrayed in earlier news reports. Some predicted many area residents would attend Thursday's funeral in Ingersoll

for someone they remember as a mild-mannered man and a good mechanic since he graduated from Ingersoll District Collegiate Institute.

"This is just crazy, what happened to him," said Rocky Bechard, 37. "I never had any problem with him. I let him use my shop to paint cars. He always paid his own way.

"I still think that if he indeed did shoot Scott Rossiter — I still don't believe it — he must have really been pushed into it.

"I try not to think about it. He was never out looking for trouble. The problems he had were mostly traffic violations."

Bechard's 10-year-old daughter Brandy sobbed: "He was my friend and I miss him a lot. He's not the kind of person they said he was. He ran away and then I couldn't see him any more."

**GOOD TIMES:** Bechard's brother Steve, 33, said: "We grew up together. Dave was a nice guy. We had a lot of good times. We played hockey together and worked together. He never did me wrong."

One woman said she remembered O'Neil "from the time he was a little boy, playing with the other neighborhood children and going to Sunday school with them.

"He never hurt a soul. His record was just kid stuff. I feel sorry for Scott Rossiter's family, but I feel sorry for the O'Neil family, too."

Sharon Pye, co-owner of the Putnam Mini Mart for five years, said O'Neil was a frequent customer. "He was a courteous, honest young man. If he owed me a nickel or two cents he'd be back the next day to give it to me.

"I remember my son having a problem with his motorcycle and I'd call Dave and he'd be right here to fix it."

A police investigator said Tuesday's storm halted most activity on the case.

London Free Press

Wednesday, January 15, 1992

## WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

- Sharon Pye**, Putnam store co-owner: "Nobody around Putnam is happy about what's happened with Dave O'Neil. It's totally out of character."
- Rocky Bechard**, neighbor and lifelong friend of David O'Neil: "I've really got mixed feelings. The people of Ingersoll have been putting him down, saying they can breathe easier now that he's dead. To me, that's a way out of proportion."
- Steve Bechard**, boyhood friend of O'Neil: "He'd do anything for you. He was mild-mannered. He wasn't temperamental. No, it doesn't make sense."

# Questions unanswered as O'Neil put to rest

FRIDAY, January 17, 1992

CITY EDITOR MARY NESBITT 679-0230

## FUNERAL



Sam McLeod/The London Free Press

Pastor Lisa Deurloo of Putnam United Church, with her back to the camera, embraces Alberta O'Neil after the burial of her son, Dave, on Thursday, as his father, Kenneth, looks on. About 150 attended the funeral for the man whose body was found in a shallow grave Jan. 9.

'How did Dave get caught up in all this?' a minister asked of the man suspected of killing a police officer.

By Pat Currie  
The London Free Press

They gave Dave O'Neil his final ride Thursday, down the snow-swept road from Ingersoll, past the home he shared with his parents just east of Putnam, and to the graveyard at Putnam United Church, where he earned his Sunday school certificate and sang in the choir as a boy.

There O'Neil, 34, was buried among the weathered tombstones, some dating back to the 1820s, while tears froze on the cheeks of family and friends huddled in a biting wind that put a minus-29-degree edge on a cold, hard day.

They buried Dave O'Neil, but not the questions that surround the four-month mystery which began with his disappearance after the Sept. 19 fatal shooting of Ingersoll police Constable

Scott Rossiter. It deepened with the Jan. 9 discovery of O'Neil's body, three bullet wounds in his head, in a shallow grave near Iona Station.

**INDECIPHERABLE:** The real story of what happened remains as indecipherable as the weather-scoured faces of some of the old tombstones in the cemetery.

"How did Dave get caught up in all this?" Putnam United Church pastor Lisa Deurloo asked more than 150 mourners, some weeping quietly, at a brief funeral service in Ingersoll. About 40 mourners accompanied the family to the cemetery.

O'Neil, Deurloo said, was widely known and liked in the Putnam area as a quiet, polite and helpful man, a talented mechanic interested mainly in vintage motorcycles.

The answer, for the moment,

"is known only to Dave and God," she said.

She urged the community to show support for the O'Neil family, and many did so at a post-funeral reception at the church, "rallying around the family," Putnam store owner Sharon Pye said.

At the McBeath Funeral Home in Ingersoll Wednesday night, people stood in line in the cold for 25 minutes to pay their respects, Pye said.

**TEST RESULTS:** Meanwhile, OPP investigators hope the trail doesn't end at O'Neil's grave. They are still awaiting the result of tests that may help determine how long his body had been buried before it was recovered.

Still missing is Rossiter's .38-calibre service revolver, the weapon used to fire the shot into the back of Rossiter's head in a struggle in downtown Ingersoll late on the night of Sept. 19. Rossiter died early the next day.

Tests have showed O'Neil was also killed with a .38-calibre revolver.