

HOLDS KEY TO OWN DUNGEON

John Moore, "Lifer," is Door-keeper at Gates of State Pen.

SLEW HIS FIVE CHILDREN

It Was the Worst Crime in the History of Hutchinson—In Prison 22 Years Now.

At the iron gate of the Kansas state penitentiary, at Lansing, stands a lean, meek man, whose face is marked with wrinkles. He holds the key to one of the gates, literally the key to his own dungeon.

He is John Moore, No. 3905, one of the inmates of the state penitentiary for the most brutal crime ever committed in Hutchinson, the slaying of his five little children, murdered while they slept.

That was twenty-two years ago, ever since John Moore has been in state prison, where he probably will spend the rest of his days. For years he has been a trusty gate-keeper at the prison gate.

The Night of Tragedy. It was at two o'clock the morning of March 20, 1899, that John Moore, a laborer living at 117 Third ave., east, unlocked the door of his next-door neighbor and excitedly showed that his home was aflame and his children were burning.

While the neighbors and firemen were trying to rescue the children the father, instead of helping them, jumped on a horse and rode madly down to the south end of town to notify his wife's folks about the fire.

Killed as They Slept. It was this strange conduct on his part that first cast suspicion on him. The children, ranging in age from a boy of 7 years to a baby of three, all proved to be victims of a foul murder, for their skulls had been crushed in as they slept. The slayer after killing the children had set the house afire and cremated the bodies.

Moore was convicted of the murder and sent to state prison for life. His wife, who was away from home at the time, insisted at first in belief of innocence of her husband. The woman with which the crime was committed, a heavy hatched, was found in the ruins of the home. Mrs. Moore later secured a divorce from her husband, and was restored to her maiden name of Franklin.

Five Little Graves. Out in the east edge of Oak Side cemetery are five little graves, close by side the graves of the five little victims of the midnight tragedy.

All of these years John Moore has insisted that he did not kill his children, or that if he did he did not know it and couldn't explain it.

At the penitentiary he is trusted, and for years has been effulgent as a doorkeeper.

Hubert Kelley, a staff writer for the Kansas City Post, visited Moore the other day, and wrote of the "lifer" who holds the key to his own prison:

To stand on the threshold of freedom with a life sentence weighing down the very soul and the key to your prison in your hand—that demands a gut to endure.

At the Prison. Yet that is what John Moore, No. 3906 at Lansing, is enduring. Trusted by his superiors, yet threatened with a temptation that is too much for a man to stand, he walks at the gate of his prison with the key to his dungeon and his liberty in his hand, letting people in and letting people out.

If you converse with John Moore, the conversation is yours. His answers are succinct, direct and amazingly shrewd. Yet there is no malice in his frankness. He bears a gentleness in his eyes and a dignity in his carriage.

When one leaves the penitentiary and the iron gates clank behind him, he cannot resist turning and bidding John Moore good by.

Has Perfect Record. Ten minutes of casual conversation with Moore will make this impostor irrefragable. His face is so frank, his eyes so quiet and kind, that it is impossible to believe that he has ever done wrong.

Throughout Warden J. K. Coddling's administration, which has covered a period of more than 11 years, Moore has never been reprimanded. The guards say that his demeanor is faultless. He is one of the most trusted men in the institution. His veracity is never questioned.

Not Guilty to Himself. Yet if Moore is asked whether he is guilty of the crime for which he is sentenced to be his jailer, he says, "If I did it, I don't know it."

A doctor, who testified after Moore had come to the penitentiary, stated that he had treated Moore for several years and thought that he had cured him of epileptic insanity. Apparently Moore had not been cured for his constancy will not admit the falsehood when he says, "If I did it, I don't remember it."

Wants to Get Out. The most tragic element in Moore's character is his hope. If he had abandoned that, he would not be the excruciatingly pathetic convict he is. Of the three discussed herein, Moore is the only man who wishes to be free. He is only 57 years old, still young enough to have a little happiness before him.

When asked what he would do if he were liberated, he said sadly and half heartedly, "I would get into some little business. But I suppose things would look different if I got out."