



# **Guilty By Popular Demand: A True Story of Small-Town Injustice (True Crime History (Kent State))**

*Bill Osinski*

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### **Murder and miscarriage of justice in a rural community**

The townsfolk of Logan, Ohio, a mined-out area of the Appalachian foothills, cheered as an innocent man was convicted and sent to death row. The occasion was the conviction of Dale N. Johnston. His trial ended nothing; the tragedies had just begun. What really happened on that bitter cold day in January 1984 was the total collapse of the local criminal justice system.

It began with a lovers' quarrel. On October 4, 1982, Johnston's stepdaughter Annette Cooper Johnston an 18-year-old beauty contestant, horsewoman, and aspiring computer programmer fought and quickly made up with her 19-year-old boyfriend, Todd Schultz. They were last seen walking together on the C&O Railroad tracks, crossing a trestle bridge over the Hocking River. Ten days later their mutilated torsos were found floating in the river. The next day their heads and limbs were found buried in a cornfield between the river and the tracks.

Dale Johnston was the sole suspect from the beginning. It took a year, but investigators and prosecutors built a case against him, alleging he had kidnapped the victims near downtown Logan and killed them in the presence of his wife and his other stepdaughter at their mobile home ten miles outside of town. He was accused of butchering the corpses and carting them back to Logan for burial and disposal. The state's case was built on rumors of an incestuous relationship between Johnston and Annette and was bolstered by a hypnotized "eyewitness" and a disputed footprint expert. Most of what was presented at the three-week trial was based on fabrications, melodramatic fiction, and forensic fairy tales. As a reporter for the *Akron Beacon Journal*, author Bill Osinski covered the trial and was shocked by the guilty verdict.

After five years on death row, Johnston was released on appeal. Prosecutors were forced to dismiss the charges, but Johnston and the rest of his family remained under a cloud of presumed guilt for nearly two more decades. In 2008 two other men were indicted for the murders of Todd and Annette.

True crime buffs, historians, legal professionals, and readers who enjoy an extraordinary story will find *Guilty by Popular Demand* a compelling addition to true crime literature.

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