

Thomas "Tom" Lyness

Tom Lyness

Early Workers

July 16, 2025

TOM LYNESS — BOZEMAN, MONTANA – DECEMBER 10, 1931

Someone was recounting the attempted murder of Tom Lyness in Bozeman, Montana, on the morning of December 10, 1931. Annie Sumner and her two daughters, Eva and Bertha, professed, and plans were made to baptize the two daughters. Annie's husband, Bill Sumner, was a barber, and in those days, he would travel to locations in and around the city and cut hair. He came to the house where Tom was staying and asked to speak to him. He asked Tom to meet him at the Baltimore Hotel the next day for a visit. Some of the friends warned Tom not to visit with him, but Tom felt his interest was genuine and he wanted to see if he could help him.

Vernon Myers [Bro. worker] drove Tom to the Baltimore Hotel where Tom got out at the front entrance while Vernon looked for a place to park the car. Bill Sumner was waiting for Tom in the lobby. He invited him upstairs where he usually did his barbering. There was a single chair in the hallway and Mr. Sumner invited Tom to sit down while he looked for another chair. After Tom sat down, he pulled out his revolver and shot Tom three times. One bullet glanced off his shoulder blade and the other two bullets crisscrossed in his head. Tom collapsed and fell to the floor. Today, two bullet holes are still seen in area where Tom was shot.

Bill Sumner went downstairs and notified the front desk that he shot a man upstairs. The police and a doctor were summoned to the hotel immediately. Mr. Sumner went to the police station and turned himself in, confessing to law officials that he shot Tom Lyness. He was released on bail while the District Attorney, Fred Lay, prepared papers to charge him with the attempted murder of Tom Lyness. However, the proceedings were held up, pending the outcome of Tom's condition.

The attending physician said there was nothing he could do for Tom. However, Vernon insisted the doctor perform surgery and do what he could. After the surgery, the doctor exclaimed, "It was nothing he done to keep Tom alive—it was a higher power." He kept living day after day, and Arthur [Pickness?], Vernon, Annie and Nellie took turns sitting with him in the hospital. He would have lapses of consciousness and inquire why they weren't in mission work! Finally, he was released from the hospital.

Sometime after that, Tom, Vernon and Arthur met Mr. Sumner on the streets of Bozeman, and he remarked, "I thought you would be dead by now." After that, Annie Sumner would phone the workers and let them know where he would be going that day so Tom wouldn't run into him again.

Bill Sumner was sentenced to fourteen years in the Deer Lodge State Penitentiary Prison. Officials wanted to release him earlier because of good behavior, but his temper got the best of him while he was cutting the hair of an inmate. Sumner slashed his throat!

Mrs. Sumner refused to sign the necessary papers for his early release, so he ended up serving twelve of the fourteen years in prison. Meanwhile Eva and her daughters settled in Missoula.

After he was released, he made threatening statements to his friends about doing Tom in next time. However, shortly afterwards, he was crossing the railroad tracks between Bozeman and Belgrade and the railroad lights were flashing. Apparently, he believed there was enough time to beat the fast moving north bound train. The Sumner car collided with the train, and Bill Sumner died at the scene of the accident.

The doctor asked Tom to come in for periodical checkups. He couldn't remember being shot, and he would refer to being "hurt" as if he fell off something. His doctor would hold up a fountain pen and ask Tom to identify it. Tom answered, "it was something to write with." He couldn't say "pen." The doctor would hold up a pocketknife and ask Tom to identify it. Tom would answer, "it is something to cut with." He couldn't say "knife." After the shooting, Tom did a lot of repeating in the meetings but there was no long range damage. Tom died in 1968 [correction on March 29, 1970], and he is buried south of Manhattan in the Meadow View Cemetery next to his sister Annie Lyness.

NOTES:

Read on TTT: [Great Falls Tribune, Montana Newspaper articles:](#)

BARBER SERIOUSLY INJURES WORKER TOM LYNESS IN HOTEL LOBBY

Thomas "Tom" Lyness was born August 9, 1883 in Ireland and died in Montana, US on March 29, 1970, aged 86.

Came to America in 1905; PIONEERED the work in Idaho, USA.

Brother to sister worker **Annie Lyness** (born February 15, 1877, Ireland—died June 1, 1970, aged 93) who spent most of her years in the work in Montana and died just a few months after Tom. They share the same tombstone. [View tombstone in Findagrave](#)