

### TOMMY BURKS OBT.

b. 22 May 1940 – d. 19 October 1998, TN



Tommy Burks, politician. Burks served as a Member of the Tennessee State House of Representatives from 1970 to 1978, and as a Member of the Tennessee State Senate from 1978 until his death in 1998. Burks was shot and killed in his pickup truck near Monterey, TN, on October 19, 1998. Burks's political opponent, Byron Looper, allegedly shot and killed him for his seat in the state senate. Looper was arrested and charged with Burks's murder and in August 2000, he was tried for murder and convicted, and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

**Tommy Burks** (May 22, 1940 – October 19, 1998) was a farmer and Democratic party politician in Tennessee, United States. He served in the Tennessee House of Representatives from 1970 until 1978, and in the Tennessee State Senate from 1978 until his murder in 1998.

Born in Cookeville, Tennessee, Burks was one of the most conservative Democrats in the state legislature. He opposed the teaching of evolution in school science classes (twice introducing legislation to restrict its teaching), legal abortion, gambling, and a state lottery. However, his views seemed to have been very popular and in line with a large number of voters within his rural district.

Burks was an energetic legislator who almost never missed a floor or committee session. It is reported that he would on some occasions arrive at a session having already gotten up on his farm, delivered a load of hogs to Knoxville (approximately 90 miles east of his home) and then driven to the State Capitol in Nashville (100 miles west of his home and 190 miles west of Knoxville). Despite the 100 mile distance, and unlike most legislators from parts of the state a considerable distance from Nashville, Burks made it a practice to go home to his district and his farm almost every night, even during legislative sessions.

Burks was murdered by his Republican Party opponent Byron Looper less than a month before his likely re-election. His widow, Charlotte, ran for his seat and won, becoming the first Tennessee State Senator to win as a write-in candidate and one of very few American politicians to win as a write-in candidate ever.

Interstate 40 through Putnam and Cumberland counties is named the "Tommy Burks Memorial Highway".

- **Tommy Burks (1940-1998) of near Monterey, Putnam County, Tenn. Married to Charlotte Gentry Burks. Born in Cookeville, Putnam County, Tenn., May 22, 1940. Member of Tennessee state house of representatives, 1970-78; member of Tennessee state senate, 1978-98; died in office 1998. Church of Christ. Member, Farm Bureau; Lions. Shot to death in his pickup truck, apparently by his opponent for re-election, Byron Low Tax Looper, near Monterey, Cumberland County, Tenn., October 19, 1998. Interment at Crestlawn Memorial Cemetery.**

**Looper, Byron Low Tax** (born c.1964) of Cookeville, Putnam County, Tenn. Born in Putnam County, Tenn. Democratic candidate for Georgia state house of representatives, 1987; Republican candidate for Tennessee state house of representatives, 1992; Republican candidate for Tennessee state senate, 1998. Changed his middle name from Anthony to Low Tax. He was indicted in March, 1998, on 14 counts of official misconduct as Putnam County Tax Assessor. **On October 19, 1998, he shot and killed Tommy Burks, his opponent for a state senate seat; he was arrested soon after and charged with murder. He lost the November 1998 senate election to Burks' widow, who ran as a write-in candidate with the support of both parties.** In August, 2000, he he was tried for murder, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison without parole. Still living as of 2000.

**Walter Fred Burks**

Walter Fred Burks, born 1 July 1907 – died 4 October 1962. He married Christine Gilliam. Father of Tommy Burks, politician. \*See Tommy Burks, buried in Crest Lawn Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN.

\*See Former Bryon Looper home demolished.

\*See Senator Charlotte Burks Story: History Putnam Co., TN files at:

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