

Ike Buffin becomes a reason to fight the Ku Klux Klan in Harrison County

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Through official documents it would be difficult to prove that Ike Buffin ever existed.

No public records exist at the Harrison County Courthouse to show it. He owned no property; is never mentioned in a lawsuit or criminal case. While the date of his death is known with some certainty — July 14, 1923 — there is no death certificate on file. It is unlikely that birth certificates exist for any of his 12 children. Likewise, it is unknown where Buffin is buried, or if his grave is even marked.

In more ways than one, in 1923 black citizens in Harrison County and across much of the United States were invisible.

Buffin was most assuredly a victim of Marshall's "Invisible Empire," Klan No. 168. If nothing else, his victimization made people acknowledge his existence. For about a month in 1923, his death at the hands of the Klan propelled him onto the front pages of both Marshall newspapers. He became a cause for the white people who were



fighting the Klan and the control it exerted over the county.

Ike Buffin was in his home on July 14, 1923, a Saturday night. He lived on land that was then called "the Abney place," some five miles south of Waskom on the Waskom-Elysian Fields Road, what is now Farm-to-Market Road 9.

Buffin did not own the land he lived on but was still referred to by some as a "prominent Negro farmer." It isn't clear what that means, but it could have meant simply that he was well-known by the white community. It isn't known today, either, how Buffin lost one arm, though farming accidents were common. In those days Harrison County was mostly a cotton economy, so it is likely that Buffin and his children worked the cotton fields.

But a great deal is known about the simple circumstances surrounding Buffin's death. A group of white men drove to Buffin's home that night and called out to Buffin to come meet them at the road. He was told to bring a bucket of water because the men's car had "bogged down in the mud down in the bottom" and they needed his help to get out.

It might have made Buffin suspicious that white men were asking for assistance from a one-armed black man in getting their car free. Whatever the reason, Buffin said he was undressed — probably in

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