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Jury fails to bring justice for Buffin

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they released that day:

"On July 14, last there occurred in this county a most heinous, cowardly and unprovoked murder of an old one-armed negro man, with a family of 12 children....

"We have used every effort to secure proper evidence in the case to bring these murderers to justice. While the grand jurors feel sure they know who these murderers are, and know the parties who they are sure know the murderers and produce the evidence to convict them, still we are unable to secure this evidence due to the fact that there is a reign of terror existing amongst the negroes from Jonesville and Waskom to Elysian Fields and brought about by a lawless element who have perpetrated a number of crimes during the last few years, and who have so far never been brought to justice."

"That lawless element was Marshall Klan No. 168.

In their investigation, grand jurors could not even determine for sure why Buffin had been targeted, other than a remote possibility. It seems that earlier on the night of the murder, one of Buffin's nephews had been attacked by a group of white men while attending a "negro baseball game." However, Buffin wasn't present and likely did not even know of the altercation.

"We regard this crime as

a distinct blot on the good name of our county and recommend to the officers and next grand jury that every effort be made to continue this investigation, with a view of punishing these murderers.

"The grand jury has elicited a great volume of evidence which we believe will finally terminate in the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators of this crime, and such evidence is being carefully preserved."

If any other grand jury ever again took up the case of Ike Buffin, there is no notice that ever appeared in either Marshall newspaper. The evidence that was supposedly so carefully preserved — if it ever actually existed — has disappeared into the dust of time.

After Sept. 1, 1923, Buffin's name was never seen in the newspaper again, other than as a reference in a few editorials. He, too, disappeared in the dust.

But the Klan lived on.

Perhaps the unnamed prosecutor from Harrison County decided if he couldn't beat the Klan he would use them. Or perhaps that prosecutor was one of the reasons that justice could not be served in the early 1920s here.

In any case, *The Marshall Messenger* reported on Oct. 24, 1923, that an unnamed "trial judge" of the county — which likely was P.O. Beard

— refused to allow the prosecutor — likely County Attorney J.T. Casey — to play to Klan sympathies during a jury trial.

Early Tucker, a black man, was on trial for cattle theft after he was allegedly found branding a calf belonging to Charley Jackson.

The prosecutor was making his final arguments to the jury when he reportedly said this: "If there is a member of this jury who is a member of any sect, organization or clan whose purpose and designs are the more rigid enforcement of the criminal laws of this state, you have an opportunity in this case to demonstrate your sincerity to the teachers and doctrines of such organization."

The judge reprimanded the prosecutor and ordered the jury to disregard the remark though, since it had already been made, that was probably difficult. The jury sentenced Tucker to two years in prison. The appeals court affirmed the sentence, but commended the judge for his stand.

In the same day's newspaper was a report on a speech given by the Klan's Imperial Wizard in Dallas on what was called "Klan Day" at the State Fair of Texas.

The speaker, Dr. H.W. Evans, said Jews, Catholics and blacks defied "every fundamental requirement for assimilation." He said

the Klan's only purpose was to support "Americanism."

It is not known how long the Klan was active in Marshall. Though it was still powerful in Harrison County in 1924, it was being hurt by a number of outside events that included numerous scandals by the national leaders of the Ku Klux Klan.

Neither newspaper reported any attacks during the next few months, but it would have been surprising if the usual threats and intimidation stopped. Perhaps they would have been too commonplace to merit reporting.

The Klan did have one last big event for Marshall, though, on the eve of the run-off election for the governor's seat between Democrats Felix Robertson — the Klan candidate — and Miriam (Ma) Ferguson.

On the night of Aug. 21, 1924, the Klan paraded through the streets of downtown Marshall, but this time there were differences. For one thing, the vast number of Klan marchers came from out of state.

The Marshall Morning News reported that the downtown area included both those who spoke for and against the Klan. Cheering was also greatly diminished, the newspaper said.

It published a story by a writer who called himself



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"On looker," who said Marshall citizens resented the number of those from out of state trying to influence their votes for Robertson.

"I stood at the corner of Austin and Bolivar streets," On Looker wrote, "and not once was their a cheer, not one word of approval, only an occasional jeer from some disgusted citizen."

On Looker wrote that even when passing Klansmen asked for cheers, none were given to them.

"I feel quite sure there must be considerable disappointment in the Klan circles at the failure of Marshall of applaud or get scared at the Invisible Empire's parade. I am disposed to think Marshall will never see another masked parade."

On Looker was right. When Ms. Ferguson easily beat Robertson, the Klan was at the beginning of the end. It is still likely, however, that it remained as an organization for years in Marshall, only without much force behind it.

In the end, there are many more questions without answers about Marshall Klan No. 168. There is no tally of crimes Klan members committed in the name of stopping crime.

We do not know how Marshall's substantial Jewish population at the time dealt with the Klan, or, for that matter, the town's Catholic citizens. The newspapers, even when being aggressive, obviously left out many of the details of Klan rule.

We do know that some courageous citizens, such as T.W. Davidson, Homer Price, W.A. Adair, E.B. Blalock, Tom Whaley, Hobart Key, John Brownrigg and Major E.J. Fry did not hedge in their opposition to the Klan.

We don't know the price they paid for doing so. Obviously, however, it was a price they were all willing to pay. For that, we — those who inhabit this place nearly 90 years later — can all be thankful.

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annelaaubry
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