

Buffin becomes reason to fight Klan in county

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his drawers — and could not leave the house.

The men persisted. They told him that being undressed did not matter and that he could come undressed, but to come now.

Buffin would have been in an untenable situation. If he did not go to see the men, he must have known they would have come to get him. He might have been thinking of the safety of his family when he stepped out of the house and walked through the yard to the gate.

At the gate two men grabbed him and Buffin knew what was going to happen. Both newspapers reported that when Buffin saw he was about to be killed, he asked the men to go ahead and take care of their business. He wanted to die at home.

The men obliged, one raising a double-barrel shotgun and putting two rounds of buckshot into his body at close range. Within a few minutes Ike Buffin was dead. For a while, at least, he would really be somebody.


News of Buffin's death was at the top of the front page of the *Marshall Messenger's* next edition on July 16, 1923, under the headline: "One-Armed Negro Called From Home, Shot To Death; Special Session of Grand Jury Called."

A short, boxed item at the top of the story quoted County Attorney J.T. Casey — there was no district attorney at the time — saying that the names of the men responsible for Buffin's death were known to him, as were the facts of the case.

Casey said Buffin's murder rivaled another famous Texas murder of the time, the killing of Otto Lange at Somerville. He said he "intends to use all efforts in his power to bring the murderers to trial."

The next day an odd story appeared on the *Messenger's* front page, it was concerning a letter from M.M. O'Banion to then Lt. Gov. T.W. Davidson from Marshall. O'Banion said the citizens of Waskom were upset about the killing of Buffin and asked for help.

PRINCE'S PREFERRED TAXICAB TO ROYAL EQUIPAGE



Three Indictments Returned But None in Buffin Case

POWER TO STOP!

Switch Your Motor Vehicle to Pierce-Hill Buick Company

Notice, Car Owners

Pierce-Hill Buick Company

Power to Stop!

Switch Your Motor Vehicle to Pierce-Hill Buick Company

Motor Bus Service

Marshall and Shreveport Division

Ford Owners!!

H. D. Wilson & Son

"Citizens of Waskom protest against the massacre of a colored farmer citizen of our county by certain unknown white men. Ask that you use state rangers to apprehend the guilty parties and offer a reward for the capture and conviction of the guilty parties."

What made the letter remarkable — particularly after the results of the investigation made it clear that Ku Klux Klan No. 168 was involved, is that O'Banion himself was an acknowledged Klan member. He had taken off his hood and revealed his membership to the assembled crowd. It only

seems plausible that the letter was a cover for the Klan, since O'Banion was well-known as a member.

That same day — July 17 — the Harrison County Grand Jury met in special session to consider both the Buffin case and the murder of Joe McKnight, who had been killed the day before after a wedding in the black community.

In the same story that announced the meeting of the grand jury, the *Marshall Morning News* noted the large rise in murder cases from the previous year. In 1922 Harrison County only had one reported murder. In 1923, there had been nine murders by the middle of July — this is more than generally happens in this county today, though the population is much greater.

Both newspapers reported on July 18, 1923, that the

grand jury had worked all day on the Buffin and McKnight cases "examining witnesses," but had come to no conclusions.

"Mr. Casey (county attorney) states that it is the intention of the grand jurors to dig into the bottom of the cases and to do everything in their power to see that the offenders are brought into court to answer for their crimes," the *Marshall Morning News* said.

Casey also told the *Morning News* that a large number of witnesses were being called before the grand jury in the Buffin case. "The names of the slayers of Buffin have not been made public," the *Morning News* reported, "but it is understood that the grand jury has before it evidence which places the responsibility."

But the evidence was apparently not good enough.