

Martin County Sheriffs – Part II 1899-1931

The history of law enforcement in Martin County dates back to the pioneer days of the mid-1800s and includes some very interesting and colorful incidents. The following is the second in a series of three articles, including pictures, documenting the sheriffs that served Martin County from 1857-1978. This is based on information taken from the archives of the Pioneer Museum as well as documentation and research provided by Martin County Deputy Sheriff Jean Vath.

E. E. Ward served as sheriff of Martin County from 1899-1912. During his tenure, the construction on the “new” Martin County Courthouse began in 1906. That construction uncovered a “mysterious skeleton,” at the rear of the courthouse, thought to be either a man or a canine. Of course, there were also a number of crimes that took place during Sheriff Ward’s tenure. One involved the Peoples State Bank of Monterey being robbed of \$1,485.00. Another involved Sheriff Ward shooting and killing a man in front of Wallace’s Clothing Store. The man in question was attempting an escape from an alleged sexual assault charge.

William S. Carver served as sheriff of Martin County from 1913-1926. Ironically, Sheriff Carver was also a high ranking member of the KKK while serving as sheriff. A major crime that took place during his term involved the National Bank of Truman being robbed in 1924. During this bank heist, seven men overpowered the Truman Village Marshall and locked him in the jail. The men escaped with \$300.00 in cash and six safe deposit boxes. Carver lost his bid for reelection in 1926 primarily due to his high conviction rate of bootleggers and his association with the Klan, in spite of his plea to the public that his Klan involvement was simply a mistake.

Gus Jorgenson served as sheriff of Martin County from 1927-1931, and was the first Martin County law enforcement officer to be killed in the line of duty. On September 8, 1931, he was called to a farm in Nashville Township where a farmer and his wife had been threatened by a beet worker. Sheriff Jorgenson arrived and went to the shack where the beet worker was located. The beet worker, Nicholas Rodriguez, greeted him at the door, shot him in the chest, and pushed him out of the door. Sheriff Jorgenson staggered to the farmer’s house, collapsed, and died on the steps leading up to the farmhouse. A posse of law enforcement officers and the National Guard then used tear gas to force Rodriguez out of the shack. He came out shooting and, as a result of his noncompliance, was consequently shot and killed by the posse.

The early to mid-20th Century provided unique, interesting and challenging issues for law enforcement. The challenges law enforcement officials face seem to change from one era in history to the next, perhaps at least partially as a result of societal and

cultural changes. Crimes involving identity theft or credit cards would have been unlikely or unheard of until more recent times. However, although criminal activity appears to evolve from era to era, the challenges and conflicts in one form or another evolve as well for law enforcement officials.





