

Bio & Character Sketch of George Washington Barkwell

Dec 22, 1874 – Sept 13, 1948

Age in April, 1923: 48 Age at Death: 73



Age when picture was taken: 46

From all sources I found, George Barkwell was a well-known, but not well-liked man in and around Columbia and Boone County, Missouri. He begins to show up in the local newspapers in 1903 when he bought two mules. By this time he was already married with two children. The next year, Barkwell and his wife suffered the loss of their youngest daughter at the age of six. A few years later, in 1906, he helped a black woman who was partially run over by a train. The papers reported that she was under the influence of drugs, and that George had taken her from under a train that backed up on top of her, and then got medical assistance for her. By 1908, Barkwell had made his way into the construction and coal distribution business. He owned the Barkwell Feed and Coal Company. He began bidding on city contracts for sewer, sidewalk and road construction. He bought a cottage on Seventh Street, took his daughter to the fair and accepted a visit from his brother who lived in Leavenworth, Kansas. That year his father-in-law was kicked by a horse but not seriously injured, however his brother was shot and killed in a gunfight in Colorado Springs. The next year, in what appears to be Barkwell's first crossing with the law, he and a group of other men are caught engaging in illegal gambling. Half the group pleads innocent and goes to trial, but Barkwell and a few others plead guilty and are each fined \$25. plus court costs. Later that year Barkwell and his wife Maggie suffer a short illness but both recover.

In March 1914, Barkwell's daughter Grace – still in her senior year of high school – is married. The marriage would end in divorce. Just five years later, in April of 1919, George Barkwell wins the election for Columbia's City Council as the long-term Councilman for Ward 1. That same year, Barkwell is sued by a brick supplier for lack of a complete payment on an invoice. By this time, Grace has followed her father into the construction business as is widely liked. Early in 1921, Barkwell's wife Maggie succumbs as a result of Diabetes. The same month, he is installed as a Sentinel in the Columbia Chapter of the Knights of Maccabees.

In 1923 Barkwell led a lynch mob that murdered James Scott, an indicted-but-not-yet-tried black man. He was later tried and found not guilty. Grace runs up to hug him after the verdict is read. After the trial he continues his coal and contracting business. He's arrested for gambling on a couple of occasions – charged notably by Ruby Hulen for betting on an election but pays a small fine. In 1926 Barkwell's daughter Grace dies at age 30. In late 1928, he marries Ruth Crouch who brings with her a son, J.T. Whitlock. On Monday, September 13, 1948, Barkwell died at Noyes Hospital in Columbia of heart failure at the age of 73. His death receives front page news coverage in both local newspapers. His wife has either pre-deceased him or is no longer married to him, so he leaves his entire estate to his step-son, J.T. Whitlock.



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Mob Leader

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Character Sketch

George Barkwell saw no gray areas and he had an axe to grind with life itself. Despite his successes in politics and business, his personal life was in shambles. By 1921, half of Barkwell's family was gone, his young daughter and wife were both dead. Even his political victory almost ten years later is not nearly as satisfying as it should have been and he resents what God has done to him.

To compensate, Barkwell has relied on a small gang of friends who think the same way he does. They see "right is right" and "wrong is wrong" and the negroes are usually on the wrong side of just about everything. Barkwell is familiar with the tools used in the jail assault; an axe, a sledgehammer and chisel, and an acetylene torch. He knows where to get them, and how to use them, but he is also cunning enough to push the manual labor off to one of his gang members.

In the screenplay, Barkwell is described as the "alpha male." He's the leader because he's was a success in both the political arena and in business. He has a quick, but devious mind. He knows how to lead and influence people. To many Columbians, Barkwell is a bully, a brutalizer who leads a gang that will follow him no matter what that requires. But to Barkwell, he's ready and willing to do the kinds of things that most Columbians "want" to have done, but don't have the guts to do themselves.

To have openly - in front of over a thousand people – killed a man, Barkwell had to be supremely confident that what he was doing was right and that no one would punish him. The fact that he was arrested and indicted for premeditated murder probably surprised him, but he must have known that, in the end, his peers would come to his aid.

When Barkwell finally discovered that he killed a likely innocent man, he probably still felt justified because he acted based on the certainty of Scott's guilt that the Daily Tribune stated.