



Harry N. Graves, framer of the Texas Highway Patrol bill

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Written by Chris Dyer Friday, 10 April 2009

Williamson County has quite a roster of individuals who have contributed to the course of history. There are a few unsung heroes who do not have immediate name recognition, and over the years, knowledge of their accomplishments has faded from public memory. One individual fitting this description is Georgetown's own Harry N. Graves.

Born in 1877, Graves arrived with his family to Georgetown in 1884. In 1896, at the age of 19 he was admitted to the bar. He left the county to practice law, but eventually returned to the hometown where his work would eventually propel him to the Texas House of Representatives and Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. In 1898 Graves was elected Georgetown city attorney. He went on to practice law with D. W. Wilcox and served three terms as Williamson County attorney. While serving in that capacity, Graves was an integral member of the prosecuting team that was the first to publicly face and convict the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1920s in a court of law. This team of prosecutors included Graves, Wilcox, W. H. Nunn, J. F. Taulbee, Richard Critz, E. H. Lawhon and Dan Moody.

The KKK trial served as a turning point in the careers of each member of the prosecuting team, but was especially so for Moody and Graves. Moody was elected governor of Texas in 1927 and made it his mission to clean up the culture of corruption that Gov. Miriam Ferguson had brought to the Capitol. Moody knew that he had a supporter and an honest, ethical man in Graves, and backed him. By 1929 Graves was elected to the Texas House of

Representatives, where he would serve until 1937. Graves shared many of Moody's ideologies, including staunch support for prohibition, efficiency in government and a vision for a safe, organized highway system.



Graves, with the support of Gov. Moody, wrote the bill establishing the Texas Highway Patrol in 1930. Leading up to that time, increasing traffic on the less-than-adequate and poorly maintained Texas roads — a carryover from the Ferguson administration — was becoming a very real threat to public safety. Graves established the new agency to address these needs along with the need for statewide enforcement of traffic regulations governing truck and everyday automobile traffic. The newly formed Texas Highway Patrol also made it possible to enforce existing regulations. Graves' insight led to the eventual formation of the Texas Department of Public Safety and a safe and organized state highway system.



The prosecuting team for the Williamson County Klan trials included Richard Critz, J. F. Taulbee, Dan Moody, W. H. Nunn and Harry Graves. Photo courtesy The Williamson Museum



Harry N. Graves - Photo courtesy The Williamson Museum

Judge Graves was interred in the Republic Hill Section of the scenic Texas State Cemetery in December 1957. His headstone only mentions his time spent working for the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals (1937-1954). The Texas Historical Commission said that Graves "left behind a legacy of civil rights and public safety for Texas."

The Harry Graves' residence, which he called home during the KKK trials, still stands in Georgetown on Olive Street. The Williamson Museum volunteer Marietta Mugford has lived in and maintained this home for many years. Mugford applied for and received a historical marker for the home in 2007. The house and neighborhood look very much like it did when Graves lived there.

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