

Martin County Sheriffs – Part III 1931-1978

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 last 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.

William L. Roehler served as Martin County Sheriff from 1931-1946. The 1936 Hand's Park tornado took place during his term in office. Also, three Welcome businesses burned, a plane crashed in Monterey killing one person, and two escapees from a Nebraska prison were apprehended in Martin County.

From 1947-1950, A. R. Batterman served as sheriff with William Musegades being appointed Deputy Sheriff in 1947. During Batterman's term in office, a daring bank robbery occurred in Ceylon in 1948 when two young Martin County men held up the Ceylon State Bank escaping with \$5,000.00. One of the men singlehandedly robbed the bank while his accomplice, watching from a nearby café, was drinking coffee with his family. The bank robber was described as a lone bandit masked in a dirty white handkerchief holding a large nickel plated revolver. He entered the bank stating, "This is a stick up. Put 'em up and let's have no monkey business." Then the robber forced the bank employees into the vault and made another employee lock the vault. Although the thief made off with \$5,000.00, he failed to notice \$1,674.00 in a cash drawer and another \$3,500.00 in another bank vault.

His accomplice conveniently left the cafe, commandeered the getaway car, and picked up the robber around the block after he left the bank. Within two hours of the robbery, one of the crooks returned to the bank to inform the bank employees that his revolver, which had been purchased at Colvin's Store in Fairmont, had been mysteriously stolen. What a coincidence! It seems criminals sometimes want to return to the scene of the crime. Deputy Bill Musegades was in the bank at that time and considered his story to be a bit suspicious at best. Consequently, he kept the suspect under careful scrutiny, eventually approaching him and asking where the money was hidden. Then, Sheriff A. R. Batterman and a bank employee drove to the farm of the parents of the suspect. There it was learned that the two young men had in fact divided the \$5,000.00 at that location. It was further determined that the money was hidden in the barn on the farm site and in a tree by a creek. When apprehended, the two boys pleaded guilty. They were sentenced to 40 years in jail; however, being minors, they were remanded to the custody of the Youth Conservation Committee.

William Musegades served as Sheriff of Martin County from 1951-1971. When elected, he couldn't immediately take office because he was on active duty in the military. Consequently, William Klusendorf acted as Sheriff until Musegades returned in August of 1951. His wife, Velma Musegades, cooked for the prisoners, was also deputized, and later served on the Governor's Crime Commission. During his service as sheriff, a Grand Jury was called for a triple murder and one of his deputies, Lester Uhrhammer, was killed in the line of duty.

One September evening in 1955, Deputy Uhrhammer and a friend were on their way to a dance at Interlaken when they saw an individual driving erratically. Deputy Uhrhammer recognized the individual and noted that his license had been previously revoked. They followed the vehicle and made a stop four miles north of Sherburn. While Deputy Uhrhammer was searching the vehicle, his gun discharged, hitting him in the hand and face and killing him. The Grand Jury called in this case returned a "No Bill," by a vote of 17-6, meaning charges would not be brought against the driver of the vehicle.

From 1971-1978 Richard H. Evanson served as sheriff. The yet unsolved murder of JoAnn Bontjes took place in 1975 during his term in office.

Sheriffs that have served Martin County since 1978 include the following: Larry Willard from 1979-1982; Gerald Nutt from 1983-1994; Robert Meschke from 1995-2002; Brad Gerhardt from 2002-2010; and the current Sheriff, Jeff Marquart, since 2010.

Law enforcement in Martin County, and throughout the United States, continues to evolve and criminals continue to seek new means of creating problems for society. However, thanks to the ability of our various levels of law enforcement agencies, they are able to keep ahead of the criminal element and maintain a safe society.

For more information on this topic, or to become a member, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.







