

Was This A Sign Of A Growing Movement Across the South?
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The following incident was reported in the January 1, 1904 edition of the Brownsville States Graphic.

During the morning of Christmas Day 1903, John Jackson, a 28 year old African American, accompanied by his 20 year old brother, Walter Jackson, went to the nearby country store at Rudolph, Hollinghead Store, to settle an account. A dispute arose over a 15 cent difference in the amount of the account.

Tom Hollinghead, a 15 year old white teenager, the son of Thomas and Sarah Hollinghead, got his gun and threatened to shoot John and Walter Jackson. The Jackson men fled the store. Hollinghead with gun in hand gave chase. Hollinghead's mother chased after her son who had a reputation for being a quarrelsome character, ready to fight at any and all times. She begged him to put the gun away.

Meanwhile after fleeing the store, the Jackson brothers went to the house of Andrew Pugh, age 25 who joined up with them along with another Jackson brother, Allen who was 15 at the time. Reportedly they made no mention of the morning incident at the store. The Jacksons were known to be peaceable and not troublemakers.

Around 2 p.m. that afternoon, after going to several homes of blacks in search of the Jacksons, Tom Hollinghead saw them passing on the road in front of his family's house. Hollinghead got his shotgun and hid in a thicket along the way with the intention of ambushing the Jacksons.

When the three Jacksons and Andrew Pugh came along, young Hollinghead opened fire injuring all four men. John Jackson drew his pistol and returned the fire killing Tom Hollinghead with a bullet to the chest. There were unnamed witnesses who corroborated the sequence of events.

The three Jackson brothers, John, Walter, and Allen along with Andrew Pugh were arrested and a trial was held. It appears the four were found not liable for Tom Hollinghead's death but John Jackson was charged with a violation of a gun law.

What makes this incident stand out is the fact it was reported by at least three newspapers outside of TN - the Fort Worth Star Telegram in Texas, the Emporia Gazette in Kansas, and the Charlotte Observer in North Carolina.

The year 1903 was a time when powerful forces in the South were rapidly and steadily eroding the economic and civil gains made by African Americans since 1865. There were strident, clamorous Southern voices demanding abolition of the 15th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. Segregation laws were being passed by state legislatures and being implemented at the local level. Terror incidents involving killings of adults and even children were increasing.

So was young Hollinghead a disreputable 15 year old acting on his individual whims or was he representative of a highly destructive virus that had been implanted in the hearts and minds of a generation of white Southern males?

This incident from nearly 120 years ago was unearthed through research of the Brownsville States Graphic and other newspapers by Memphian, Ms. Charlene Epps.