

John Cline Proctor

John Cline Proctor was buried in the family plot just outside Joplin, Virginia. According to the *Washington Post*, 800 people had just attended the funeral, two miles down the road at the home of his mother, Mrs. Roberta Proctor Randall. This was certainly one of the largest attended funerals that anyone could remember in Prince William County. The number of attendees is more astounding since he was just 19 years old, and it took place in the very rural Joplin in 1928. His mother, sister, and sweetheart all collapsed at the grave and were put under the care of a physician.

In September 1926, on the road from Quantico to Washington, there had been a series of holdups. The description of the bandits, in every case, was four men and a red-haired woman. The crimes would go unsolved, but some people thought they knew who was responsible.

A gang of men including, John Proctor; Nicholas Eagles, a brother-in-law of Proctor; Samuel Marino; and David McCabe went on a crime spree on or about September 26. Their crimes included the holding up of the "Million Dollar Grocery," taking \$200; robbing a gas station in NW Washington, taking \$200; stealing a car near Rhode Island Avenue; stealing a car and robbing a N. J. man of his money; stealing a car and possessions from Mr. & Mrs. Mark Reed of Deepwater, NJ; and stealing a car from the owner of the "Whitehouse Tavern" at Berwyn Md. This string of crimes ended with the stopping of the last stolen car in Washington, DC by policemen Leo W. K. Busch and Frank L. Ach of the tenth precinct.

While being questioned and in the process of being arrested, Proctor and the others broke free and started shooting, wounding the policemen. Both policemen were shot three times and Officer Busch died later. Although having been shot, the policemen returned fire at the fleeing four, wounding Proctor. All were later caught, brought to trial and convicted. Where upon Proctor, Eagles, and Marino were given the death penalty.

The death penalty was to be imposed by the electric chair June 22, 1928. The order of executions would be made, depending on circumstances. All continued to blame each other for the shootings and did so to the end. Local newspapers reported an attempted suicide by Proctor and that he was unconscious. This fueled speculation by the public that he had cheated the system and was dead. All were sent to the electric chair on the scheduled day, including Proctor who was transported to the site unconscious on a stretcher. Officially, the sentence was carried out.

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