

MASS GRAVE ISSUE:

The alleged mass grave issue raises two (2) questions, "Is there a mass grave?" and, if so, "Who is in the grave?" In order to answer the two part question Agents began by attempting to identify persons who could not be accounted for after the first week of January, 1923, as well as persons identified by family or survivors as being killed during the violence at Rosewood. In order to identify persons believed to have perished the first week of January, 1923, Agents reviewed testimony and statements made by survivors and descendants who claim to have knowledge of the events which occurred in Rosewood as well as newspaper accounts of that time period. As a result of these reviews, a list of possible victims was developed. The victims list was then compared against the Death Certificates on file at the State of Florida Bureau of Vital Statistics in Jacksonville, Florida for dates of death and place of burial. Agents also viewed numerous cemeteries in and around Levy County in order to locate other alleged victims and their corresponding date of burial. As a result of this review, it was determined that there were a total of eight victims of the Rosewood violence that can be identified at this time. Four (4) of these known victims, Sarah Carrier, Sylvester Carrier, Lexie Gordon, and James Carrier, are considered the most likely candidates for occupants of a mass grave, should one exist.

Two (2) of the confirmed deceased, Henry Andrews and Poly Wilkerson, were white males that were killed during the shoot-out at the home of Sarah Carrier. Both Andrews and Wilkerson were buried in formal settings and their graves can be accounted for.

Agents were able to locate Death Certificates for all eight (8) known fatalities. The Death Certificate for Mingo Williams indicates that he was buried in Bronson, Florida, some twenty (20) miles from Rosewood, and indicates a cause of death consistent with reports. Sarah Carrier, Sylvester Carrier, Lexie Gordon, and James Carrier's death certificates indicate that they were killed in a manner known to be consistent with eyewitness reports of the violence and were buried in Rosewood. The death certificate for Sam Carter, does not list a burial site, but does give a cause of death that is consistent with eyewitness and survivor accounts of the violence.

It should also be noted that there is a discrepancy concerning the date of burial on the Death Certificates of Lexie Gordon, Sarah Carrier, and Sylvester Carrier. The date of burial on the certificates is listed as November, 1923, some ten (10) months after the incident at Rosewood. The dates of death on the death certificates for Sam Carter, Sarah Carrier, Sylvester Carrier, Lexie Gordon, and Poly Wilkerson were changed from November to January, and all were filed on November 6, 1923. Darleen Newmans, a supervisor at the Bureau of Vital Statistics in Jacksonville, Florida, advised Agents that it was common practice for counties to submit Death Certificates late in the year in order to clear up administrative paper work.

Eyewitness accounts confirming a mass grave are few. The most credible of these accounts comes from former Levy County Sheriff James Turner who stated to Writer Gary Moore that as a fourteen year (14) old he was taken to the site of a mass grave soon after the incident occurred in Rosewood. Turner states that he was taken by car to a place well down the railroad tracks from the Rosewood Depot, to a point approximately opposite the intersection of Highway 24 and the road to Chiefland between the highway and the railroad tracks. This area is known as Goins Quarters. Once at the location, Turner states that he observed a number of persons in the grave. Turner also stated that as an adult he had gone back to the area of Goins Quarters repeatedly, in an effort to locate the mass grave and had been unable to locate the site. Moore feels that if Turner could not locate the grave site, even though Turner had lived his entire life in the area, it is doubtful whether the site, if it exists, can be located now.

The other eyewitness account comes from Jason McElveen who lived in Cedar Key at the time of the Rosewood incident. McElveen states that a mass grave was dug utilizing a large fire plow pulled by two (2) mules. The location of the mass grave is described by McElveen as being near a slight bend in the railroad tracks west of Rosewood. The area described by McElveen is also in the area known as Goins Quarters.

James Turner passed away in 1986 at the age of 78 and Jason McElveen passed away in 1983, at the age of 88.

Writer Gary Moore stated that a second possible location for the alleged mass grave is adjacent to, or in the Rosewood Cemetery and possibly contains only the known Rosewood victims. Fred Kirkland told Moore in 1982, that the African American victims from the Carrier house shoot-out were buried at the Rosewood Cemetery. Newspaper accounts at the time report that James Carrier was interrogated, then killed beside the fresh graves of his mother and brother in Rosewood. Another newspaper gave a similar story reporting Carrier was killed next to the fresh graves of four blacks killed in the violence, and reported the site of the graves as the Negro Cemetery at Sumner. This article may or may not be describing the Rosewood Cemetery some three (3) miles from Sumner. An Editorial condemning the killing of James Carrier mentioned that the event took place at a cemetery.

Gary Moore stated that, in his opinion, the issue of the mass grave may never be resolved. Moore's method of attempting to resolve the mass grave issue was to identify Rosewood residents who may have been unreported victims of the Rosewood violence and then attempt to locate someone who saw them in the years following the incident, or show that they died or moved from Rosewood prior to 1923. Moore reports that, to date, he and FDLE have been able to eliminate all but two (2) of these persons. These two (2) possible Rosewood victims, James Hall and Laura Henry, are the fifth and sixth candidates for occupants of a mass grave.

On July 13, 1994 members of the Levy County Sheriff's Department and FDLE searched the areas where the mass grave is alleged to exist. The first area searched was the Rosewood Cemetery and surrounding area. The Rosewood Cemetery is located in what was once the central part of the town of Rosewood. The cemetery is grossly overgrown with trees and heavy shrubbery and the majority of the headstones appear to be missing from the graves. Investigators were able to locate approximately nine (9) possible grave sites at the cemetery, of which only two (2) have headstones. The two (2) existing headstones indicate that the persons buried there died prior to 1923 and were not involved in the Rosewood violence. The remaining seven (7) possible sites are positioned in a manner that is consistent with the two (2) graves that have headstones.

The second area that was searched was the eastern end of the area known as Goins Quarters. Goins Quarters is comprised of approximately eighty (80) acres of thick woods and swamp and is devoid of structures or land marks, with the exception of the abandoned railroad bed that runs along the Southern end of the Quarters. A search of the Goins Quarters area near the railroad bed failed to produce information relevant to the mass grave.

In an effort to ensure that the search for the possible mass grave site was conducted in the areas described by Gary Moore and others, FDLE Agents returned with members of the Levy County Sheriff's Department, Attorney General's Office, Writer Gary Moore, and FDLE Crime Scene Technicians and again searched the areas of the Rosewood Cemetery and Goins Quarters. This second search was conducted on August 22, 1994 and covered larger portions of the same areas as was previously searched. This second search was based, in part, on a compilation of bits of information gathered by Gary Moore over the course of his investigation. Investigators were unable to locate any sites that could possibly contain multiple bodies. At the conclusion of the second search, it was agreed that without new information the possibility of locating a grave site in the Goins Quarters area is virtually impossible without an extensive excavation of some 80 acres of property, mostly covered with trees.

REPORT CONCLUSION:

All investigative efforts have been pursued to their logical conclusion. There have been sixteen (16) suspects identified as being present and or involved in various aspects of the 1923 violence at Rosewood. Fourteen (14) of these suspects have been shown to be deceased. This list of fourteen (14) deceased suspects include all major suspects in this case. The remaining two (2) suspects, considered minor, cannot be located and are believed dead, as their ages would be in excess of 95, if alive today. There is no evidence or witness testimony which would support a criminal prosecution, if these remaining two (2) suspects were found alive today.

The mass grave issue may never be resolved. This investigation has concluded that the most likely place of burial for the Rosewood African American victims is the Rosewood Cemetery, but cannot discount the statements of former Sheriff James Turner who places a mass grave in the Goins Quarters area. A conscientious effort has been made to account for all African Americans known to have resided in Rosewood prior to the 1923 violence. To date there remains two (2) individuals (James Hall and Laura Henry) who cannot be accounted for, and remain candidates for unrecorded African American fatalities in the Rosewood events.