



Bio & Character Sketch of Congressman Sam Major

July 2, 1869 - July 28, 1931

Age in April, 1923: 53 Age at Death: 62

Age when picture was taken: 55

Barkwell Defense Lawyer
Congressman Samuel Major

Samuel Collier Major (July 2, 1869 – July 28, 1931) was a U.S. representative from Missouri.

Born in Fayette, Missouri, Major attended the public schools and Central College at Fayette. He was graduated from St. James Military Academy, Macon, Missouri, in 1888. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1890 and commenced practice in Fayette, Missouri.

He was appointed prosecuting attorney of Howard County in 1892 and later was elected to the office for two terms. He served in the Missouri Senate in 1907–1911. He was an unsuccessful candidate for election in 1916 to the Sixty-fifth Congress.

Major was elected as a Democrat to the Sixty-sixth Congress (March 4, 1919 – March 3, 1921). He was an unsuccessful candidate for reelection in 1920 to the Sixty-seventh Congress and resumed the practice of law in Fayette, Missouri.

Major was elected to the Sixty-eighth, Sixty-ninth, and Seventieth Congresses (March 4, 1923 – March 3, 1929). He was an unsuccessful candidate for reelection in 1928 to the Seventy-first Congress.

Major was elected to the Seventy-second Congress and served from March 4, 1931, until his death in Fayette, Missouri, July 28, 1931. He was interred in Fayette City Cemetery.

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Character Sketch

Major was a huge man, both literally and figuratively. He stood over 6'6" tall and likely weighed over 300 pounds.

His success in the law and in politics did not go unnoticed by his constituents.

In the Barkwell trial, Major was but one of the three members of a "Dream Team" that were assembled for their legal prowess as well as their "heavy hitter" status in the community. It was quite evident that George Barkwell had a lot of financial support in order to afford the attorneys who represented him.

For his part, Major's cross-examination of reporters Foster Hailey and Charles Nutter were impressive. He diminished the appearance of Barkwell's role in the assault on the jail when he questioned Foster Hailey. His attempt to bully Charles Nutter to shake his "near certain" testimony was a valliant to discredit his eye-witness account, however it appeared that Hailey may have gotten the best of him. (Only to have his character denigrated in the Prosecution's closing argument when they valued their eye-witnesses "over a hundred Nutters.")

Still, just having a sitting US Congressman (on break from his duties in Washington DC) on his defense team must have been a real advantage for Barkwell in the eyes of the jury.



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SIDE

MAJOR

Yes, your honor.

The tall Congressman walks toward the jury box and stares down at Nutter before asking his first question.

MAJOR

Did you even know George Barkwell's name before the evening of the lynching?

NUTTER

No, sir.

The Congressman addresses the jury more often than the witness as he continues.

MAJOR

Could you describe the clothing the man carrying the rope wore that night?

NUTTER

No, sir.

MAJOR

If it was too dark to see his clothing, how can you be confident about his identity?

NUTTER

It wasn't too dark. The moonlight and arclight made everything clear. I'd already seen Barkwell's face at the jail and heard him called George. When I saw the same face at the bridge, I heard someone call him Barkwell, so I turned to another man and double-checked both names. As for the clothes—he was in shirtsleeves, but I didn't study them closely because it didn't seem necessary.

Major walks to the witness stand and stares down at Nutter.

MAJOR

If you were so certain George Barkwell hanged Mr. Scott, why didn't you report that in your newspaper story? Wouldn't that have been important?

SIDE

NUTTER

Barkwell might have sued the paper for libel.

MAJOR

Truth is an absolute defense in libel cases. A truthful reporter should have nothing to fear.

NUTTER

Perhaps, but naming names in this kind of story just isn't done. It would smack of frontier justice.

MAJOR

Why didn't you give Barkwell's name to police the night of the lynching instead of waiting for the grand jury?

NUTTER

I did report it that night. I told officer Plez King when I saw him in front of Boone Tavern.

MAJOR Nothing further your honor.

As the Congressman returns to the defense table, Hulen stands.

HULEN

The prosecution rests.

GANTT

Let's break for lunch. This court will be in recess until one o'clock.