



Lynch Mob Member
Emmett Smith

Character Sketch of Emmett Smith

While Emmett Smith was perhaps not as prominent a member of the lynch mob as Red, Lou, Hamp or, of course, George Barkwell, his close proximity to the site and his later testimony points to his deep involvement and knowledge about the lynching. His fantastical court testimony, laced with Unnecessarily infused humor, was both misleading and appalling.

All this, from a man who was the chief cashier at the Exchange National Bank in Columbia. A man who had previously help the title of Exalted Ruler of the local Elks Club. The Treasurer of both the Rotary Club and the Commercial Club in Columbia.

Despite his rotund size, Smith was also a member of the local country club where he undoubtedly forged meaningful relationships with Boone County's elite class, people who could overlook a "white lie" in order to save the skin of one of Boone County's good (white) citizens.

Emmett Smith's role in the feature is small, but his "meaning" is far greater. He symbolizes the level of deceit that the powerful in Columbia were willing to descend to in order to save one of their own from being convicted for a murder that they felt was justified. In his single, portly self, Emmett Smith symbolizes all the elite class co-conspirators in Columbia who knew what was coming, tacitly approved it and then tried – and succeeded – in evading any responsibility for it.



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Emmett Smith sits relaxed and cheerful on the witness stand.

HARRIS

Could you please state your name and occupation.

SMITH

Oh, everybody knows me, I think—right boys?

HARRIS

For the record, then?

SMITH

Emmett Smith. Chief Cashier at the Exchange National Bank.

HARRIS

You know the town and its residents well. You were at the bridge the night of the lynching.

SMITH

Absolutely.

HARRIS

Did you see George Barkwell there?

SMITH Yes, indeed, Senator. He was standing by the railing on the north side, so I waddled my way over to talk with him.

HARRIS

What did you talk about?

SMITH

I told him the night was getting away from us and I was afraid I'd be late for a lecture.

HARRIS

A lecture?

SIDE

SMITH

That's right. I told George I'd be late for a lecture about how wrong it is for a man to stay out late smoking tobacco and drinking hard liquor.

HARRIS

And what did Mr. Barkwell say?

SMITH

Well, you know George. He asked "what kinda goddam idiot would give that kind of lecture at 1:00 on a Sunday morning?" So I told him

Smith pauses for effect. Harris takes the bait.

HARRIS

You told him what?

SMITH

I told him I'd appreciate it if he'd stop calling my wife a goddam idiot.

Laughter erupts from the gallery and jury box. Judge Gantt frowns and raps his gavel once.

DAVIS

Mr. Smith, how well do you know Mr. Barkwell? In a typical week, would you say you talk at least once?

SMITH Certainly.

DAVIS

Two or three times a week?

SMITH About that, maybe more. He enjoys my company.

DAVIS

For how many years have you been friends?

Smith pretends to count on his fingers.

SIDE

SMITH

Lordy, twenty or more, I guess. We're getting older, aren't we George?

DAVIS

So you would call him a close friend?

SMITH

Absolutely.

DAVIS

Are you aware that a fund has been collected to pay the cost of Mr. Barkwell's defense?

SMITH

Yes, sir.

DAVIS

And did you contribute to this fund?

SMITH Y

Yes, sir. I did. And if you legal geniuses manage to drag out this trial for another day, I'll likely need to kick in more. A couple of the jurors smile.