



Columbia Police Chief
Ernest Rowland

Bio & Character Sketch of Ernest Sylvan Rowland

July 25, 1880 – June 3, 1949

Age in April, 1923: 42 Age at Death: 68

Age when picture was taken: (est) 50

From all sources I found, Ernest Sylvan Rowland was destined to be in law enforcement. He was born in 1880 in Columbia, Missouri, the son of Joshua Marion Rowland and (Nancy) Emily King Rowland. His father Joshua fought for the Confederate Army in the Civil War.

Joshua died in 1903 when Ernest was just 23; his mother died twelve years later in 1915. Ernest was a farmhand in his early working years. In 1917, at the age of thirty seven Rowland enlisted in the US Army and was a Sergeant in the 60th Infantry of the 5th Division in World War I. In 1918, he was awarded the Croix De Guerre by France after being wounded in battle.

After returning from the war, likely with the help of his brother Dexter “Deck” Rowland, he became a Columbia police officer. For a period of time, Rowland also was a deputy warden for the Missouri State Penitentiary.

He was a member of the local American Legion, and in April, 1920 he was made a captain of the club “The Odd Fellows,” which was also the same club that George Barkwell belonged to, but perhaps not at the same period of time. However, Rowland was also a charter member of Columbia Lions Club and he appears in a group picture with Dr. S.F. Conley and Fred Bright (both of whom helped to bail out Barkwell) as well as Boone County Sheriff, Fred Brown.

In April, 1921 Ernest Rowland is elected as City Marshall.

In April of the following year, a story ran in the local newspaper that spoke about a local black man who had been arrested for forging a check. The man had previously been serving a life sentence at the penitentiary, but with the urging of Ernest Rowland who was working there at the time, the man had his life sentence commuted and he was placed on parole. (He was sent back to prison for the check forging scheme.)

Rowland was the brother-in-law of County Sheriff T. Fred Whitesides who served from 1917 to 1920, immediately before Sheriff Fred Brown took over from 1921 until 1924. He had four siblings including brothers Dexter, James and William and a sister, Nora. Notably, Rowland was the first cousin of Hampton ‘Hamp’ Rowland, friend of George Barkwell and co-conspirator in the murder of James Scott.

Ernest Sylvan Rowland died in Whipple, Arizona in 1949 at the age of 68.



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Character Sketch

Ernest Rowland was the pride of Columbia. He was a decorated war hero and a connected member of Columbia's local community. He served at the state penitentiary before the war and he was on the Columbia police force for a few years before becoming the Chief. He was the brother-in-law of the Boone County Sheriff, Fred Whitesides and his brother "Deck" was also in law enforcement having gotten him his first job at the penitentiary. So as Chief, Ernest felt comfortable in his job. It certainly wasn't as difficult as slogging through the Ardenne Forest in France.

Keeping up with the newest methods of investigation was not Rowland's strong suit. He knew how to "police" and that was good enough for him. He also knew that his cousin Henry (aka "Hamp") was a small-time bully but he made sure that their names and reputations still remained intact. At some times, that required a little "fiddling" with the duty officer.

The Almstedt girl's rape was important and it needed to be solved asap. "Got the dogs from Audrain County within the hour." I figured it wouldn't be hard to find the guy since he had that real particular kind of mustache, like Charlie Chaplin's."

Rowland was probably typical for his day. His techniques were "old school," not cutting edge. His demeanor was friendly, but not to everyone. His work was complete but his details were lacking. He did know how to cover his ass however, assuring the newspapers that the Almstedt investigation was complete and unquestionably accurate.

That Rowland never intervened in the assault on the Boone County Jail just a couple of blocks away from the police station shows that he was out of touch at the least, and culpable of malfeasance at the most. His oath to protect the citizens of Columbia evidently only extended to those he knew and liked.



Summary Justice Partners, llc

Davis, Rowland, and Hulen sit at a small conference table. Davis leads.

DAVIS

So your conclusion was that the dogs were following a false scent?

ROWLAND

Well, yes, there were negroes aplenty in that restaurant, and maybe one of them belonged to those coveralls. But none of the men fit the girl's description. None had that funny little mustache.

DAVIS

Got it. So Saturday morning, April 21. Before you took Scott to Miss Almstedt's house, you took two other negroes there? And she said neither man was her attacker.

ROWLAND

Right.

DAVIS

And did either of these have the funny little mustache?

ROWLAND (pauses, cautious)

No.

DAVIS

Mustaches come and go, don't they?

ROWLAND

The girl was acting strange. I began to think she was just confused about the mustache. These men I brought—they were exactly the sort of negroes who might, you know. They were the bad kind.

DAVIS

But when she didn't identify either of those, you decided the mustache was an important clue after all?

ROWLAND

Correct. It was important because it was all we had left after the hounds failed. We had to use what we had.

DAVIS

And so you and your men started looking for negroes known to have such a mustache.

ROWLAND

Correct.

HULEN

And you went to Mr. Scott's house yourself?

ROWLAND

Correct.

HULEN

How did you know Mr. Scott had a Charlie Chaplin mustache?

ROWLAND

He was pretty well known around town. City boy, nappy dresser, led their Emancipation Day Parade in his fancy car. The mustache seemed to suit his style.

DAVIS

Did you present Miss Almstedt with any other negroes who had a Charlie Chaplin mustache—individually or in a lineup?

ROWLAND

No, and I doubt there's another nig.... (he catches himself) negro in this town with a mustache like that. Might be a Chicago thing, a big-city thing.

HULEN

If we found another negro today with a Charlie Chaplin mustache, would that shake your confidence that Scott was the man?

ROWLAND

Not at all. You know better than anyone how many ways we got the girl to identify him. Two eyeball lineups. The voice lineup. That damned stinky formaldehyde lineup. We got the right man. It's a damn pity what happened after that, but we got the right man.