The judge and the crusader

A former district attorney explores the history of the county's most famous prosecutor and son in new book

By MANDY SHELTON

District Judge Ken Anderson and former Texas governor Dan Moody have quite a few things in common. "We both were District Attorneys. We both went to the University of Texas," Judge Anderson said, adding that he, unlike Moody, graduated from law school.

"I also had a better conviction rate than Dan Moody. When I found those two acquittals he had, I went 'Yes!'"

Moody made a name for himself in the 1924 trials and convictions of four Ku Klux Klan members in the very courtroom in the Williamson County Courthouse where Judge Anderson worked for ten years.

As a new District Attorney in Williamson County, Judge Anderson recalled hearing about Moody and wondering how exactly he "broke the Klan's back." A lack of solid answers led to years of solitary research. "My friends, family, and co-workers thought I was crazy," Judge Anderson said.

After reading seven years' worth of local newspaper archives on microfilm, the discovery of the Klan trial transcripts in Austin was a major coup for Judge Anderson's research. "I found out it wasn't just some myth," he said.

Now, Judge Anderson said he finds that whenever he starts to tell the story Dan Moody, people are willing to listen. Judge Anderson's 1998 kids' book, You Can't Do That, Dan Moody!, became a play staged in the same courtroom where Dan Moody put a stop to the "invisible empire" of the KKK.

"What's interesting in history isn't the broad general stories," Judge Anderson said. "It's the very specific stories which make up history... American history is just full of these stories that get lost."

Crusader for Justice

Judge Anderson's new book, Dan Moody: Crusader for Justice, serves as the first biography of one of Williamson County's most famous sons.

"He really was interesting, more for what he did when he wasn't governor," Judge Anderson said.

"He had an interesting and colorful career; all before he was 35 years old."

Moody, Anderson writes, was born and raised in Taylor, and became County Attorney in 1929 at the age of 27. His fast-paced rise from District Attorney to Texas Attorney General and finally Governor provides the structure of Crusader for Justice. The core of the book is broken into chapters that reflect the stages of Moody's career:

"To some extent, it made it harder, because it was so compressed in the earlier part of his life. His last thirty years get one chapter." The later part of Moody's life included an unsuccessful run for United States Senate, the only time when Moody was not elected to an office for which he ran.

Another "unexpected jewel" Anderson included in his biography was Moody's involvement in the 1948 "Box 13" scandal that saw Congressman Lyndon Baines Johnson win the Democratic run-off for the Senate. 200 Johnson votes appeared after the election was over, in what Moody referred to as a "stuffed" ballot box in Jim Wells County.

Fergusonism

Moody's fight against what he labeled "Fergusonism" as Attorney General and gubernatorial candidate provides another of the book's conflicts. In some sense, Jim and Miriam Ferguson, the "Ma and Pa" governors of Texas, could surpass even the Klan as the true villains
In the early 1920s, Dan Moody, the youngest district attorney in the county’s history, took on members of the Klu Klux Klan, who were accused of savagely beating a travelling salesman.

of Dan Moody’s story.
“Sure, they were as evil as they sound,” Judge Anderson said. “I’m reading the biography on Miriam Ferguson, and I’m thinking ‘These people belonged in jail.’”
The terms of both Governor Fergusons were tainted by stories of corruption and extortion. “They sold pardons, but the road construction business is where they were going to take Texas to the cleaners,” Judge Anderson explained.
Moody won his Attorney General seat in the same election that put Ma Ferguson in the Governor’s mansion. Mrs. Ferguson is portrayed in Crusader for Justice as a mere puppet for her impeached husband than as a true Governor of Texas.

It was Moody who exposed the fraud within the highway commission, and won himself enough support to beat Mrs. Ferguson at the polls to win the next gubernatorial election. Anderson writes that,

Turn to MOODY, Page 3B.
before leaving office, the Fergusons gave Moody one more "vindictive slap," by pardoning Murray Jackson, the first Klan member convicted by District Attorney Moody in the famous 1924 trials.

**Legal Heads**

After Moody's 1927 inauguration as the youngest governor in Texas history, an editorial in the Austin newspaper claimed that “a constructive, broad-gauged and fearless mind sits within the head of the 33 year old redheaded smiling youngster.”

The passage, included in *Crusader for Justice*, evokes a few more similarities between the author and his subject. “When I was younger, my beard was actually reddish,” said Judge Anderson.

Along with the ginger-tinted locks, Anderson said he used his own thirty years of legal experience to immerse himself in the Klan case, as a way of "understanding the politics and legal strategies" that Moody used throughout his career.

“From a legal standpoint, it’s crystal clear to me what Moody was doing,” Judge Anderson said. “He did a fantastic job, and I think he was operating as much by instinct as by talking to older lawyers.”

To lawyers and law students today, Dan Moody's strategy might seem almost textbook, Judge Anderson said. “He was blazing some trails on how to put these cases together. Today, we see public corruption more, so these strategies are widely used.”

Judge Anderson said he believes that the legal light he shines on the story will make it a more interesting read, but explained that he was also careful to include footnotes and documentation that should give the book weight as a historical biography. “I hope that any professional historian that looks at the book will be satisfied with my research,” he said.
District Judge Ken Anderson stands in the historic, recently restored 26th district courtroom where Dan Moody successfully prosecuted members of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. Mr. Anderson, formerly the county's district attorney, has written a biography on Moody entitled Dan Moody: Crusader for Justice. Mr. Anderson has previously published a novel for young adults on the Klan trials called You Can't Do That, Dan Moody!, which was adapted into a play that was performed this year in the 26th district courtroom on the second floor of the Williamson County Courthouse.