

George Curtis, who we honor today, would have been forgotten, but for my grandfathers memory of him. Murdo McIver was my grandfather.

About 50 years ago, he told me that he and fellow Fairmont area rancher Eric Munz were working on the dirt road together near Eric's ranch when they were passed by a line of speeding Model T Fords filled with men armed with rifles. The cars left a mile long trail of dust in their path. It was not until later he learned that George Curtis' murder was the reason for their presence. He then related to me what had occurred on February 1st, 1916.

Henry Kent, a rancher who lived about a half mile east of George Curtis' ranch had allowed a man, who claimed to be George Mason, to stay at his ranch while awaiting funds to buy the ranch. Concluding that Masons' stay was only a ruse employed to gain free room and board, Mr. Kent demanded he leave. Mason armed himself with Mr. Kent's shotgun while Mr. Kent went to recover Mason's shoes. Upon returning with the shoes, he was shot in the chest by Mason. Kent, though seriously wounded, ran away through brush that was six feet high, and Mason who was reloading, lost track of Kent. Kent was able to reach the Curtis Ranch where he reported the incident.

Elizabeth Lake Constable Fred Price was called on the nearest phone a mile distant at the Fairmont store. Constable Price arrived at the Curtis Ranch with Justice Granton Bennett to investigate the incident, where they learned an attempted murder had occurred.

George Curtis, 31, armed himself with a rifle and bravely joined the constable and justice as they left to arrest Mason. Finding that he had fled the Kent Ranch, the three tracked Mason, who was accompanied

by his dog, to a small abandoned cabin a few miles south of the Munz Ranch. They ordered Mason's surrender, but he fired at them from the cabin. Fire was returned, then, a plan was made to break open the door with a heavy grubbing hoe that was at the cabin. Justice Bennett broke open the door while George Curtis guarded with his rifle. As the door broke open, Mason immediately fired from inside the cabin with the shotgun stolen from Kent, instantly killing Mr. Curtis and wounding Justice Bennett.

Justice Bennett went for help, with Constable Price staying at the cabin to guard against Mason's escape.

A posse was formed in Lancaster, which included Eddie Doyle and 35 or 40 other men who had armed themselves with rifles. Speeding to the scene, they found Constable Price had indeed prevented Mason's escape, but nightfall was quickly approaching.

Constable Price concluded that there was not sufficient daylight to await the arrival of deputies who had earlier been notified and were driving from Los Angeles. Fearing Mason's escape under the cover of darkness, he ordered the posse to open fire on Mason in the cabin. A great number of rounds were fired by the posse, as Mason returned fire, but eventually there was only silence coming from within the cabin. Mason was found dead from two gunshot wounds inflicted by the posse.

George Curtis' body had been on the front porch of the cabin during the entire ordeal. It was taken to Mumaw and Son, Funeral Directors in Lancaster for burial.

The bravery exhibited by George Curtis and his ultimate sacrifice assisting the constable and justice, will neither be taken lightly nor will it be forgotten, thanks to those who made sure he would be remembered.

Dayle DeBry, from the West Antelope Valley Historical Society, worked with me for several years providing newspaper articles and searching for information vital to this matter. She also set in motion The Friends of Lancaster Cemetery who arranged for flowers and for the placement of the new headstone. Dayle DeBry and the Friends of the Lancaster Cemetery are deserving of recognition and thanks.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Relief Association generously paid for Mr. Curtis' new headstone. I thank them for this donation.

Los Angeles County Deputy Sven Crongeyer has also been involved in investigating this incident since I first phoned him a few years ago. He has tirelessly looked into every aspect of George Curtis' murder, attended countless meetings, reviewed every piece of evidence, and has read and responded to easily hundreds of emails. Deputy Crongeyer and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department have made certain that George Curtis will be remembered for giving his life for the safety and future of the citizens of Antelope Valley. I thank Deputy Crongeyer and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department.