



## Dan Moody - Part One

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Written by Ken Anderson Friday, 14 November 2008

A chance sighting of a woodpecker caused 16-year-old Dan Moody, who was working with live electricity on top of a 35-foot power pole, to reassess his future. Moody decided that if the bird could make a living with his head, so could he. He climbed down the pole, quit his job and headed to college.

It was indeed fortunate for Texas that Moody saw that woodpecker. As events later unfolded, Moody played a major role in saving Texas not once, but twice, in the 1920s — first, from the Ku Klux Klan and then from the political corruption of Gov. Miriam Ferguson. Moody ended up becoming Texas' youngest governor.

Daniel J. Moody was born on June 1, 1893, to Daniel James Moody and Nancy Elizabeth Robertson Moody in the then fast-growing railroad town of Taylor. He grew up in Taylor where he graduated from high school. After a year as an electrical lineman, he spent four years at the University of Texas. In 1914, without completing his law degree, he left school, passed the bar exam and formed a law partnership with Harris Melasky, a childhood friend, in Taylor.

Moody developed a good reputation as a lawyer. He began his political career in 1920 by becoming the youngest person ever to serve as Williamson County Attorney. In 1922, Ben Robertson, district attorney for the 26th District which served both Travis and Williamson counties, resigned partly in frustration with his inability to obtain a murder indictment against members of the Ku Klux Klan who had killed a man in downtown Austin. Gov. Pat Neff, a tough law-and-order man who himself was a former district attorney, appointed Moody to the post.

Moody excelled as district attorney. But it was in 1923 that he faced his toughest test when he confronted the raw power of the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan, at that time a nationwide organization with 3 million members, including numerous political figures, specialized in vigilante violence. Such violence, usually in the form of a "tar party" — kidnapping, beating, tarring and feathering — was directed against blacks, Jews, immigrants, Catholics, bootleggers, gamblers and moral transgressors. There were thousands of such tar parties throughout the nation. The common thread of these assaults was that very few perpetrators were arrested and no one was convicted.



A county attorney from 1920-1921. Dan Moody won the first conviction against the Ku Klux Klan later as district attorney. Photo courtesy The Williamson Museum



The Klan's invincibility came to a crashing halt when they held a "tar party" for a young salesman whom they suspected of committing adultery in the small northern Williamson County town of Weir. On Easter Sunday, 1923, eight Klansmen kidnapped the salesman, beat him, chained him to a tree in Taylor and poured tar on him. Moody, with the help of Sheriff Lee Allen and Constable Louis Lowe, launched an investigation that identified three of the Klansmen. After the grand jury indicted the Klansmen for aggravated assault and later a Klan preacher for perjury, the stage was set for four prosecutions. Beginning in September 1923, and ending five months later, Moody obtained four straight convictions — each with a prison sentence — becoming the first prosecutor in the U.S. to succeed against the Klan.

Moody then took on the Klan in the court of public opinion. After the state's newspapers clamored for Moody to run for state attorney general, he ran and made the Ku Klux Klan the central issue in the campaign. Moody turned public opinion against the Klan and overwhelmingly defeated a Klansman who was his election opponent. From that moment forward, Klan membership in Texas went into a tailspin, and it quickly ceased to be a power in Texas.

Unfortunately, the Klan's unpopularity also led to the election of Miriam "Ma" Ferguson as governor. Her husband, Jim, had been impeached, removed from office and banned from ever holding office again because of corruption. As attorney general, Moody would have to deal with any corruption in the new Ferguson administration. The fireworks were just about to begin.

Ken Anderson, former Williamson County district attorney and current judge, is the author of eight books dealing with law and history. His current book, "Dan Moody: Crusader for Justice," is the first complete biography of Gov. Moody.

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Community Impact Newspaper



## Dan Moody - Part Two

### Dan Moody - Part Two

Written by Ken Anderson Friday, 12 December 2008

On Jan. 20, 1925, Miriam "Ma" Ferguson was inaugurated as the first elected female governor in the United States. Immediately afterward, her husband, Jim, strode into the governor's office, picked up an open Bible left by outgoing Gov. Pat Neff and tossed it aside with the comment, "Sunday School is dismissed. The Governor's Office is now open for business."

Indeed, it was open for "business." Bribes for prison pardons, kickbacks on state textbook purchases and contracts to friends to pave state roads were part of this business.

As attorney general, Dan Moody had no criminal jurisdiction, but as the state's lawyer, he could do something about the padded paving contracts. He went to court and proved that \$32 million worth of such contracts had been awarded to Ferguson friends at three times their actual value. The judge canceled the contracts. Moody and Assistant Attorney General George Christian went to Kansas City and Dallas to try to recover some of the ill-gotten gains. When they came back, they returned to the state treasury \$1 million in cash and securities that had already been paid on the fraudulent contracts.

Despite his relative youth, Moody was the logical candidate to run against Ma Ferguson in the 1926 governor's race. Moody married Abilene newspaperwoman Mildred Paxton at the beginning of the election season. That caused his race to be dubbed the "Honeymoon Campaign."

In one of the nastiest elections ever, Jim Ferguson, who made all of his wife's political speeches, took the stump denouncing Moody as having a big head and attacked Mildred as a "lipstick" who would chase Moody around the Governor's Mansion with a rolling pin. Moody kept the heat on about the Fergusons' corruption.

Moody trounced Ferguson at the polls. In a crowded field, he fell just 1,700 votes short of winning the primary outright and then buried her with a 225,000-vote margin in the runoff. The El Paso Times and Herald joined the state's newspaper chorus, cheering Moody's victory by noting, "Texas has recovered her self-respect."

The inauguration of Texas' youngest governor was held on Jan. 18, 1927. It was an inauguration of firsts: the first outdoor ceremony, the first broadcast on radio (nationwide due to Moody's notoriety) and the first where a sitting governor had been denied a second term by the voters.

Moody served two terms as governor. His reforms included ending the liberal parole policies of the Fergusons, reorganizing the state highway department and beginning a program of regular audits of state accounts. He was unable to convince the legislature to adopt a civil service program that would award state jobs on the basis of merit. His real accomplishment, however, was simply to restore honesty and integrity to the Governor's Office. He left office in 1931 absolutely penniless.



At age 33, Dan Moody was sworn in as the youngest Texas governor Jan. 18, 1927. Moody's inauguration was the first to be held outdoors and was broadcast on the radio nationwide. Photo courtesy The Moody Museum

The advertisement features a red and white color scheme. At the top left, the text 'building together' is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, with 'taylor Morrison.com' below it. To the right is a photograph of a modern home's interior, showing a staircase and a hallway. Below the photo, the text reads: 'Mention this banner to any Taylor Morrison Sales Center and receive a \$10 Sonic Gift Card'. The offer expires 10-31-08, one per household. The Taylor Morrison logo is at the bottom right, with the tagline 'Homes Inspired by You' and a graphic of four stylized figures. Fine print at the bottom left includes the Realtor's Welcome logo and copyright information for Taylor Morrison Homes, Inc.

Moody's financial condition improved dramatically when he resumed his private legal career. For the next 30 years, he was a successful lawyer in Austin. His practice included several cases before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Moody remained active in politics, but he never again held public office. In 1942, he made a last-minute decision to enter the race for U.S. Senate, but finished third.

Moody died May 22, 1966, in Austin after a long illness. He is buried in the state cemetery just 30 feet from Stephen F. Austin's grave.

Moody is the only person born and raised in Williamson County to serve as governor. As for his place in Texas history, Texas Monthly magazine, in its issue wrapping up the 20th century, named Moody "Crusader of the Century." The title is fitting for a man who dedicated his life to the rule of law and conquered some truly epic challenges of his time.

Read part one at [more.impactnews.com/2537](http://more.impactnews.com/2537)

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