

Political machine collapses after 63 years

SAN DIEGO (AP) — George B. Parr, the patriarch of Mexican-Americans in his county of Duval and some surrounding areas for more than 60 years, died with the foundation of his political power crumbling beneath him.

Parr, 74, had weathered assaults by federal and state authorities and had seen a 1934 conviction for income tax evasion wiped out by a presidential pardon by Harry Truman. The Supreme Court overturned a 1956 mail fraud conviction.

But a recent decision by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to uphold his 1974 conviction on charges of income tax evasion charges — issued coincidentally with the ouster of nephew Archer Parr as Duval County judge — meant to some that the iron grip the Parrs held on South Texas politics was finally, relentlessly, being gripped loose.

Parr grew up in the wild mesquite and cactus country of South Texas. Chunky and red-faced, he looked more like a storekeeper than an ironhanded political boss, heir to the title "Duke of Duval," passed to him by his father, former State Sen. Archie Parr.

"I'm not a boss," Parr would laugh. "The people come to me for advice because I am their friend. No one is boss in Duval County."

But Parr was the boss of Duval County.

The political legend of the Parrs began in 1912 after a courthouse massacre of three Mexican-Americans by a group of Anglos who wanted to seize control of Duval County. Archie Parr, then state senator, took the side of the Mexican-Americans.

He became their adviser, their

patron. And the father passed this patronage on to his son. Even now, the majority of the 13,000 persons who live in Duval County are Mexican-Americans.

"My father was their first friend. I am their second. They ask me for advice on how to vote. I give it freely," George Parr said. "But I don't order them to vote, or tell them how to vote."

Parr, an oil and cattle-rich millionaire, owned or was a partner in almost every business in this town of 4,500. Before the state banking commissioner made him sell out, Parr had owned the bank and another one in the Jim Wells county seat of Alice, 10 miles away.

That was before he went through the federal bankruptcy wringer. And even then, Parr continued to live in a palatial Spanish style home with his wife and their eight-year-old daughter. A few miles from town was Parr's 55,000-acre Dobie ranch, which figured in some of the many suits brought against him.

At one time, there were five court actions pending against him.

— A federal charge that he had evaded \$85,000 in income taxes.

— A charge he had conspired to commit theft of Duval County funds.

— A charge he used \$500,000 in county funds to buy his ranch.

— A charge he had borrowed the money from the county to buy the ranch and then did not pay it back.

— A suit that he used \$172,500 in Duval County funds to pay off income taxes.

But it was an election in 1948 that catapulted the Parrs into national limelight. That was when delayed votes from Box 13 in Jim Wells

County deep in "Parr Country" swung a U.S. senatorial election to Lyndon B. Johnson over Coke Stevenson by 87 votes.

Parr hit the headlines again in 1950, when Texas Rangers were sent to keep order in the Democratic primary elections in 1950, when opposition from the Freedom Party was the first challenge Parr's Old Party had seen in 39 years.

He bounced back in the spotlight — to stay — in 1952 when the son of an arch political foe was shot down in what was later termed "murder by mistake."

Politics in Duval in the 1950s was at its most flamboyant. Excitement often turned to violence: fistfights at the polls, pistol packing ballot box "observers," curses shouted between rival groups.

The Rangers returned to Duval in 1952, when the son of Parr's political foe, Jacob S. Floyd Sr., was cut down by bushwacker's bullets in the driveway of the Floyd home in Alice.

In two sensational trials, two men were tried and the charge against each was the same: that Jacob Floyd Sr. was to be the intended victim of hired killers. But the state said his son was killed by mistake.

Mario Sapet, a deputy sheriff when he was arrested, was sentenced to 99 years in prison. A jury found he had supplied arms to Alfredo Cervantes, a Mexican national named as the triggerman in the Floyd shooting. Cervantes, who fled to Mexico, was never apprehended.

Nago Alaniz, a Duval attorney, also was charged in the Floyd case. The state claimed he was a decoy to

get Floyd out of the house for the gunman. He was found innocent by a jury which decided he actually tried to warn the elder Floyd that hired killers were out to get him.

Parr's political strength came into play when C. Woodrow Laughlin, 79th District judge, was removed

by the Texas Supreme Court after a group of attorneys claimed he was partial to Parr in his decisions. Laughlin was later reelected to the unexpired portion of his term, and many of the lawyers who sought his removal asked that disbarment proceedings against Laughlin be stopped.

And now, oldtime allies are jockeying to seize control of Duval from the Parrs.

The political leader of the Carrillo family, former Rep. Oscar Carrillo, who used to be of his political

allegiance to Parr, has declared openly he will take over the reins of Duval politics.

It was a member of the Carrillo family, State District Court Judge O. P. Carrillo, who ordered George's nephew, Archer Parr, step down from his post.

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Parr death ruled suicide

BENAVIDES (AP) — Hours before the bright South Texas sun burned thick fog from the rolling hills of Duval County, it was clear something had happened to the "Duke of Duval."

Three hours before the body of George B. Parr was found in the ranch country he loved, people were talking about him as if he was dead.

"There's a new 'Duke of Duval' this morning, Archer Parr. I just knew it when I woke up," said a longtime resident who was waiting in the sheriff's office at San Diego. Archer Parr, who days ago was relieved as county judge, is George Parr's nephew.

George Parr, 74, had failed to appear in federal court in Corpus Christi on Monday. When Parr failed to appear, Nago Alaniz, Parr's lawyer, neighbor and close associate, said, "I believe he is dead." "That man would never run. He's too proud," said Leo Casas, a friend of Parr.

Because Parr had reportedly been seen in the Benavides area Monday, officers gathered early Tuesday near the gate of a ranch operated by Parr and a sister-in-law of Parr, Hilda Parr.

Those near the ranch entrance included Duval County Sheriff Raul Serna, several deputies, Texas Ranger Gene Powell, four FBI agents and two newsmen.

Shortly after 11 a.m., a Texas Department of Public Safety helicopter arrived. It swooped down, its rotors kicking up the South Texas sand next to Texas 339 about four miles south of Benavides.

At 11:15 a.m., the helicopter ascended and disappeared over the hills leading to the 15,000-acre ranch.

Five minutes later, the search was over.

The Texas Ranger's radio on the ground crackled: "We have located George Parr's automobile," a voice said. The voice gave some directions and a convoy of law officers, trailed by the two newsmen, raced nine miles across a dusty ranch road through landscape dotted with mesquite trees and cacti.

As the convoy neared the designated spot, a lonely windmill and water tank appeared in the background.

Again the radio crackled. The words needed no explanation.

"We'll need a justice of the peace and an ambulance," the voice said, indicating that the fears of Parr's followers were realized — the "Duke" was dead.

Parked between the water tower and a clump of trees was Parr's stately dark blue Chrysler. A front window was open and the motor was running.

A metal gate near the windmill creaked. The windmill, spurred by a gust of wind, made a whirring noise. Apart from that, there was silence, as the officers bent over to look into the automobile.

Inside, the man who politically controlled a large portion of South Texas for decades was dead.

A bullet from a .45-caliber pistol had pierced his skull, an officer said. Later, the officers gently pulled Parr's short, solid body from the car after first wrapping it in a blue bedspread.

The officers retrieved from the car a .45-caliber automatic pistol and a military-type semi-automatic rifle.

A funeral home hearse dispatched from San Diego had trekked the dusty countryside and was ready to take Parr's body.

The hearse drove away, leaving the silent officers.

Peace Justice Luis Elizondo of Benavides ruled that Parr died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the right temple. He said it came apparently from a .45 caliber pistol.

Judge Parr, bitter and redived as he finished making arrangements for his uncle's funeral, told newsmen:

"I have a statement. I hope the goddamned ----- sons of bitches are satisfied."

Asked to whom he referred, he said calmly: "Just put it 'they'."

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