



A High School Crime In 1912

By Gilbert Gia
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The *Bakersfield Californian* newspaper probably contributed something to the Juniors' mischief. News in January and February 1912 showed that Bakersfield was a happening place. Some of the stories were exemplary, some weren't, but the boys' youthful escapade surely matched what some adults were doing.

In January, Bakersfield's marshal escorted knights of the rail to the city limit after they were caught stealing produce from a Chinese garden¹; a strike by 440 Southern Pacific workers entered its 90th day²; and traffic congestion on Chester Avenue made the city's trustees wonder how they could remove the Clock Tower without offending Truxtun Beale.³ In February, Bakersfield's fifty-four saloons were open 24-hours a day⁴; a road race celebrating Washington's Birthday made two complete circuits from 19th and H Streets to McKittrick and back⁵; the notorious Madame Brignaudy was finally arrested for conducting a house of ill-fame⁶; and the Bakersfield

¹ *Morning Echo*, Jan 9, 1912, p 5:2

² *Morning Echo*, Jan 18, 1912, p 5:2

³ *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 28, 1912, V:27; *Morning Echo*, Jan 28, Jan 30, Feb 2, 1912

⁴ *Morning Echo*, Feb 16, 1912, p5:5

⁵ *Pacific Oil World*, Annual, Jan 1912

⁶ *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 29, 1912

Motorcycle Club held its first annual picnic at Kern River Canyon.⁷ All the activity might have inspired five Kern County High School Juniors to pull-off their own caper.

Cecil Briscoe, Homer Helm, Truman Coombs, Ira Carver, and Herbert Hearle, members of the class of 1913, had spent a good deal of time studying the high school's flagpole. In retrospect, you might say it had been intentionally designed and placed to attract youthful misdeeds: The pole occupied a position of prominence in front of the school; its circumference was natural for climbing, it had an attractive iron rod on top; and at the apex was a gleaming, gilded-sphere.



Late one Monday night in March the five crept onto the campus with the flag of their Junior class and a bucket of lard. Come morning, Principal Macomber must have looked twice and possibly uttered an expletive when he saw the Junior Class pennant flying from the iron rod atop the pole. Macomber's second words might have been stronger as he realized that the pole, from top to bottom, had been well-greased.

⁷ A ribbon awarded for the 1912 event was sold on EBay auction.

In 1912, as it is today, a prank of such magnitude does not remain a secret for very long. Confronted with their crime, the boys admitted guilt, and Macomber suspended them indefinitely. "Indefinitely" might have been for a very long time because the professor insisted that the criminals pay for the cleaning.

All day long on Tuesday the slippery pole resisted each and every effort to climb it, and to the quiet satisfaction of the Junior class, their pennant with the bold "13" waved defiantly down on Professor Macomber.

On Wednesday morning, staff and students were startled by the figure of the professor Macomber high on the roof of the school and maneuvering two long poles lashed end-to-end. At the far end was a blazing torch. Extending the weapon, Macomber stretched on his tiptoes and struggled to reach the offending pennant.

His awkward dance ended as the emblem fell in flames to the ground. "A good-natured tussle for its possession ensued between the sophomores and the juniors, wrote a local newspaper. "The sophomores were victorious."⁸

⁸ *Morning Echo*, Mar 6, 1912