

The Civil War in Daviess County

By Glenn Hodges

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The Rebels Are Bold

“Since the elephant has been won, by the fate of war, the question of disposing of him arises in magnanimous proportions before our eyes. As to how we shall dispose of the black race to his advantage of our own white society is a question.” *Monitor, Aug. 18, 1865*

The leaders and picket guards of the fanatical party have begun to openly advocate the right of the Negro to equality with the white race and demand of our president and the government that the elective franchise with all its horrible and degrading results shall be extended to the Negro. They take advantage of the political corruption in the Southern states and create a long and yawning howl because President Johnson did not override the Constitution and invest the Negro with the right of voting in reorganizing the Southern States. This would have been their initiatory step toward investing the Negro with political and social equality all over the land. But the thing is not done with; the black Republican press in the eastern states and of late to a considerable extent to the west are beginning to nod consent to the disgraceful catenations of the down east fanatics. Close by, only as far as Evansville is one of the amalgamation sect of journals that is setting sails to lead out when it thinks the minds of the people are fully prepared to receive the move without a shock and closer still may we expect to hear the same policy advocated if public sentiment admits of such policy.

There is country and a clime more suited to the nature of the Negro that this one where he can enjoy his freedom and at the same time not interfere with `the political status of any state North or South.”

Maximilian needs to be driven out of Mexico and it is not probable that he will be peaceably and quietly withdrawn by the emperor. He has manifested a disposition to maintenance him in his position.

As best we can judge from military movement in the Southwest it is the policy of the administration to threaten and probably enforce the Monroe Doctrine. If a military force is required to so let it be done by colored troops, who can be organized into an army of 75,000 to a 100,000 and by the assistance of the Mexicans that refuse the imperial rule, the occupation of Mexico would be an easy matter.

When the adult male population of the colored race have aided the oppressed Mexicans in throwing off the yoke of French oppression their claims upon the country and a right to gather their families there for future habitation can hardly be denied and would certainly meet with a favorable consideration by the Mexicans. This would take the question of Negro suffrage from our land while the Negro not being a citizen of our government it would not necessarily involve us in a war with France. The Mexican government would no doubt accept the offer and fee grateful that they had been so fortunate in receiving such a powerful addition to their strength.” *Monitor, Aug. 18, 1865, by Thomas Pettit.*

In the August 1865 election, Democrats gained a two to one majority in the state legislature, securing Kentucky for two more years from the rule of fanatics and radicals. The constitutional amendment is a dead thing so far as Kentucky is concerned. Yeaman lost by about 1,600. Ritter got nine of 12 counties with Christian County dead even. "The case in this district will not be more than a fraction over one half the vote it could have polled. This is of course attributable to the interference of the military authorities which so far as Daviess County was concern was shameful in the extreme. In Owensboro soldiers were standing on each side of the door with the voters were received at both voting points, from the opening to the closing of the polls. These soldiers themselves did not challenge voters, but their mere presence was sufficient to prevent persons from going to the polls and was in direct violation of the recent act of Congress upon the subject of military interference with the election.

The judges of the election seemed to have things their own way in many instances, positively refusing to allow person to vote after they had expressed a readiness to comply with all the requirement of the law. Several persons were arrested for merely offering to vote while others were allowed to come forward and take the oath and vote and then arrested for doing so. This appears to us to be the most unreasonable ---what else can a man than to comply with the law and with military orders and then votes and how ridiculously absurd is it to arrest a person after he has complied with all that is required of him." *Monitor, Aug. 18, 1865*

The Negro as a slave was no greater problem for Kentuckians than he was as a freedman. From the first day of the war slavery began to crumble and disintegrate and the difficulty of enforcing the slave code increased. Kentucky was hostile to the Emancipation Proclamation. The 13th Amendment abolishing slavery was passed in Congress Jan. 31, 1865, and became operative Dec. 18, 1865. The slaves were unprepared for the sudden change and were so demoralized. The condition of many of the negroes in Kentucky, free and near free during 1865 excited pity and with the coming of freedom to all at the end of the year, the situation grew steadily worse. Conditions set them in motion, severing loose from all former connections and means of support. Some wandered aimlessly toward towns and cities. "Conceived in the spirit of helpfulness and in the feeling of a bonded duty to the Negro, the Freedmen's Bureau had been going a month before Appomattox. Although designed for only those states 'declared to be insurrection' it was extended to Kentucky in Dec. 26, 1865. A state headquarters was set at Louisville, activities of the bureau were spread out over the state and food and fuel were being distributed among the needy. The Freedman Bureau Act of July 16, 1865, gave the organization more power to take the freemen under its protection, exercise judicial functions and use the military to enforce its orders. Military posts were in Lexington, Louisville, Maysville and Covington and other small town where small groups of soldiers were spread out over the states. The main service the FB provided in the early years was to stabilize labor conditions, which was the biggest problem in the state,

"The wandering negro had to be stopped and made to see that freedom did not mean idleness and vagrancy. That was hard to achieve. "Among a considerable number of the freedmen there was a spirit of industry and a balanced understanding of conditions. They were now willing to come to terms with their former masters, live in their same old shanties and receive money for their labor, and there was a tendency for the farmers to work together in solving the labor question. In some areas, scales of wages were set up and the general nature of contracts with freemen systematized. The FB had good intentions in the beginning, assuming control of the Negro workmen and supervised the making of his contracts with his former master. "It not only made the Negro suspicious of his white neighbors by offering him questionable advice, but it greatly compromised its usefulness. "The good beginning toward a mutual understanding

between the negro and his former master was thus rudely upset and the state was treated to years of labor chaos.” P. 340-342. *Coulter*

“The farmers of this county labor under a very serious embarrassment at present, the want of labor at present, and which in a great measure, must of necessity seriously affect the county’s great staple, tobacco. Many persons daily make the inquiry, Will there be a half crop of tobacco raised in this and adjoining counties? A moment’s reflection and the question can be easily answered. At the beginning of the present season labor was scarce, and could be had only at fabulous prices, consequently the farmers, a majority of whom were small, declined to take the risk of high price labor to cultivate tobacco, but preferred to curtail their crop by a third or half of what they formerly raised. This, of course, lessened the tobacco crop very much in this county.

Then came the spring and summer freshets, which in many localities destroyed the tobacco crop entirely and seriously damaged the corn crop, and what is true of this county is more or less true of adjoining counties and in a great measure true of the whole tobacco growing district of the state.

“After considerable inquiry and observation I am inclined to the opinion that it will not be more than one fifth of the crop of ‘62 and 63’ raised in this county this year, and that of very inferior quality; and this is true in a very great measure of every tobacco growing county in the state. Why is this? There is plenty of labor in the county and in the whole state but the great difficulty seems to be to get this labor. You can see any number of able bodied Negro men and boys walking the streets of every city and town in the state, perfectly idle, while the farmers are needing their services and offering large monthly or yearly wages but all to no effect. Sambo is taking it easy without any regard to or thought of providing for his comfort during the coming winter. This county and the whole state is greatly in need of this element of labor, and unless some means can be adopted by which it can be made useful, the farming interest of the county and state will be seriously, but we trust only temporarily, injured. If the agricultural interest is allowed to drag and suffer, all other branches of business must necessarily suffer in proportion. You see many farms advertised for rent or sale, and great many allowed remaining idle, and the universal reason is ‘can’t get labor.’ *The Farmer, Monitor, Sept. 20, 1865*

Farmers found it difficult to deal with the Negroes, controlled as they were by the Bureau. Negroes were led to believe they were indispensable and that their labor must be contracted for on their own conditions.” It just did not work that way. Negroes demands were too much and their reliability also suffered. Farmers thought maybe they could either do their work themselves or find white men who wanted to work in the fields. But white labor supply in the state was far from adequate, thoughts of Irishmen, Scots, Germans, English and Chinese. Whites saw that negro laborers could be impudent, insolent and factious, stop working when they pleased, allow themselves to work against their employers, became tools of bad white men and would burn and destroy the stock, crops and property of men who had supported them. Blacks were worthless as laborers. Negro population in KY decreased by 6 percent from 1860 to 1870. Many Kentucky farmers began thinking about renting their land to immigrants.

The bureau meddled. Negroes of Fayette made it plain they stood united to enter into contracts with farmers, told for we have been raised to work and it don’t go hard with us. A program for Negro soldiers worked. April 1866 civil rights act passed. Gave same rights of white men to Negroes. Destroyed what good relations existed between farmers and black laborers Kentuckians begged palmer to have the FB removed. But he refused. Legislature pleaded with

President Johnson to remove it. Jan. 1, 1869, all offices closed except in Louisville. The Bureau was gradually curtailed throughout the South by 1870. The last office shutting down in 1872.

Bureau became known for corruption, bad management and judgment. The Kentucky legislature would not ratify the amendment to the Constitution. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 granted equality to blacks and gave federal marshals, commissioners and Freedmen's Bureau the power to take legal action to Kentucky. Every state court considered the civil rights act unconstitutional. FB was best at stabilizing labor conditions. Had will to come to terms with their farmer masters, live in the same old shanties and receive money for their labor and there was a tendency for farmers to work together in solving labor questions, setting scales of wages and contracts. It began with good intentions but there was bad judgment and management, then corruptions. Gov. Bramlette wanted the Freedmen's Bureau removed from Kentucky. It was a menace to white supremacy. Families of white soldiers who had fought in war for Union asked why FB gave money to Negroes. Bramlette would to give right to slaveholders to free slaves, but hold them 10 years during which Negroes could accumulate sufficient money to provide for colonization for

Freeing the slaves meant negro suffrage and federal government involvement in state affairs. It was demoralizing to Kentucky. "Eventually the area's white soldiers left their regiments in the field to return home as they decided that their part of the war was over. Some of the returning soldiers took up battles in the political arena that they did not win in the war. Others sought vengeance and retribution for the small feuds that took place between neighbors and which ballots could not solve. . Many whites from both sides saw the world they fought for was being transformed in ways they found unacceptable, most especially slavery disintegrating with the help of the federal government. The violence that came after the war on both white and black locals ---, political, racial and personal --- stemmed from these veins of conflict within their local society. *Crane, P. 23*

Former Confederates, soldiers guerrillas and politicians maneuvered to gain control of the Democratic Party which was still in Union's' hands at the end of the war. In the August 1866 election they effectively completed such a coup with George W. Triplett easily completed such a coup with Triplett easily winning the county judgeship over one of the county's prominent Unionists John McFarland. *P.21 Crane*

A Confederate veteran attacked and badly beat James Richmond, a Unionist and former member of the Home Guard on his way to the Knottsville precinct poll in Eastern DC. Gained control of the county's legal system through Triplett's election ex Confederates now had free rein to intimidate potential rivals for power and to settle old grudges. /aP. 21, Crane

"Under the new order of things many farmers are disposed to take a gloomy view of the future of Kentucky. Always accustomed to slavery they see in the abolition of that institution future ruin following in the wake of present disaster. Their conclusion is let us hope both, illogically and erroneous. The system of involuntary servitude was far more a boon to the slave than a benefit to the master and after the country shall have recovered from the double shock given to its prosperity by a radical revolution of the labor system and the annihilation of a very large amount of property, there are plausible reasons for concluding that the solid progress of the people in a pecuniary point of view, will be rather advanced than retarded, however much the negro may suffer by being thrust into for him the abnormal condition of freedom.

"It is not at all improbable that agriculturists will, after experimenting with the freedman as a laborer be compelled by reason and his inherent vagabondism, to resort to white labor. This will

infallibly be the result if Freedman's Bureau agents by their conduct and official acts impress upon the Negro the idea that he is to be protected in idleness and insubordination.

In any event the farmers hereafter will pay his laborer, whether white or black, the value of the work he does and that only. Heretofore it has been the case that many large slaveholders scarcely maintained the expenses of their establishments, and in some instances within the observation of all of us, they failed to do even this. The day has gone by when the laborer was to be well fed and clothed and comfortably lodged, no matter where the amount of work done by him would pay for these necessaries or not and what is still more to the point, the day has also gone by when men and women, and great groups of children, too old or too young to be serviceable, are to be comfortably provided for. It is a fact capable of demonstration that under the compensated labor system especially with the aid of improved machinery, far greater results may be attained with the same capital than under the patriarchal system of slavery. So much by way of consolation to farmers who have been deprived of their slave labor! The darkest cloud may have its silver lining." *March 7, 1866*

Pettit added: "As we have before said, we must take things as we find them, and make the best bargain possible. Slavery is no more in Kentucky and Negro Bureaus are offered to us as the substitute. The question for us to decide is, 'will we accept of this Yankee contrivance or set on foot such organizations as will furnish us intelligent and enterprising white labor. We want labor that is wholly independent of the bayonet and Yankee officials who look only to self aggrandizement, a system of labor that can be depended upon in any emergency, and one which both parties will be benefited, and the resources of this Green River country fully developed. To such a system of labor must we look for such a result; and with that in view we present our readers with the above extract from the *Louisville Commercial Gazette* and recommend the subject to all, with hope that measures may soon be devised to secure this most important end. If we mistake not, there are many in our community who are deeply interested in this matter and anxious to effect an organization by which such labor may be introduced without delay.

"We have no time to lose and everything to gain by vigorous and determined action in this direction, and once accomplished we can build railroads, open our coal and iron mines, establish foundries and factories and give employment to a class which will both enrich the community and ennoble and dignify labor in all the departments of life." *Monitor, March 7, 1866*

"The rebels are bold, defiant and unscrupulous in their dementions of all men, who once wore blue or sustained the Union cause, they without provocation shot down men; and boast of it.... Some eight or ten men have been murdered around us in the last few months.....shooting (Union men) is of common occurrence, threats are daily made.

Complaint and threats are causing "white persons who served in the United States Army... bidding them to leave the county. White on white violence. Motives were both political and personal... "Amos Metcalfe, a staunch Unionist, member of the Home Guard and Enrollment Officer I for the federal government during the war, feuded with a band of former guerrillas. During the war, Walter McDaniel, Dr. George Davidson and the Carlisle brother all guerrillas, kidnapped Lt. John Hampton of the 35th Kentucky Infantry USA, took him to Indiana and killed him.

After the 1866 August elections, McDaniel got a sympathetic deputy sheriff arrest Metcalfe for the killing. Instead Greenwell, shot Metcalfe three times, leaving him for dead. Metcalfe

survived the shooting and gave deposition to Lawwill, head of FB, pressed case before local law authorities but they refused to investigate.

“There is a deep seated and bitter feeling existing among some, against the freed people they however are not the influential and respected citizens but are men who are returned guerillas and have no respect for themselves or anyone else, these men are countenanced by some of the better portion of the community because they were rebels during the late war, this makes them bold and makes them a terror to the loyal portion of the community. Freedmen’s Bureau agent Lawwill said in October 1866.

In spring of 1867, “We regret that one should so far forget himself as not to be mindful of his proper status, or to imagine that Kentucky is Africanized, and we hope for the future we will have no fault to record against anyone of their race.” *Monitor, May 22, 1867*

Incident with Andrew Fuqua, a black soldier recruited in Owensboro, who returned to the city 1866. While in grocery store, was allegedly impudent to the store owner’s wife, a white man in the store “ordered the negro to cease his impudence, and on refusing to do so, was shot instantly dead.’ Fuqua’s killer was never brought to justice.

^Aaron-A.D. Hill incident: “There is no hard or cruel treatment to the negro in this community, nor did such a case ever occur here within our knowledge, but the Negroes and their friends understand fully, and may as well, if they do not understand, that when a conflict here takes place between a negro and a white man, that in ninety nine cases out of a hundred, the negro will go under.” Pettit commented. *Monitor May 9, 1866* *oldierMonitor, May 23, 1866*

**Have the wolf by the ear and we can neither
hold him, nor safely let him go.
Thomas Jefferson, 1819 on Missouri slavery**

The U.S. Senate passed an amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery on April 8, 1864, by a vote of 38 to 6. However, just over two months later on June 15, the amendment was voted down in the House, with 93 in favor and 65 against, 13 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to send it to the states for ratification. The vote split largely along party lines, with Republicans supporting and Democrats opposing it. The resolution appeared to have died.

Fearing the Emancipation Proclamation might be forgotten after once the war ended, Lincoln asked Congress to reconsider the amendment. He called for another House vote on the amendment in his December message to the people which was printed in most major newspapers. He had faith the amendment would pass this time if given a second chance.. “A question might be raised whether the proclamation was legally valid,” he said. “It might be added that it only aided those who came into our line, or that it would have no effect upon the children of slaves borne hereafter,” he said. A constitutional amendment would eradicate slavery once and for all would be “a King’s cure for all evils,” he added. *P. 686, Goodwin.*

Lincoln conceded that “that he was asking the same body to debate the same question, but he hoped the intervening election had altered the situation,” historian Doris Kearns Goodwin writes in her much acclaimed book, *Team of Rivals, the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln.* “Republican gains in November ensured if he called a special session after March 4, the amendment would pass,” she said. *P. 686-687, Goodwin*

At the request of the president, Republican Rep. James M. Ashley of Ohio reintroduced the measure in the House on Jan. 6, 1865. Lincoln seemed confident he could cobble together the right number of votes for the Thirteenth Amendment would succeed this time around. Lincoln thought it would come down to two or three votes to get the two-thirds majority for passage.

“Lincoln set to work at once to sway the votes of moderate Democrats and border-state Unionists,” Goodwin wrote. “He invited individual House members to his office, dealing gracefully and effectively with each one.”

“I appeal to you to vote for this amendment,” Lincoln said to Missouri Congressman James Rollins. “It is going to be very close, a few votes one way or the other, will decide it.” Lincoln emphasized to Rollins the importance of sending a signal to the South that the border-states could no longer be relied upon to uphold slavery. This could bring the war to a rapid close, he said.

Secretary of State Seward also enlisted three of Washington’s most able political operatives --- Tennessee lawyer-lobbyist William N. Bilbo and Homer Nelson and Augustus Frank, both Representatives from New York --- to assist in getting the votes needed from about 20 Democrats, who Lincoln thought might be wavering on the issue.

How shall we do it? How should we proceed? The three subordinates asked. “I am the President of the United States clothed with great power,” Lincoln said. “The abolition of slavery by constitutional provision settles the fate, for all coming time not only for millions in bondage but of unborn millions to come --- a measure of such importance that those two votes must be procured. I leave it to you to determine how it should be done.” So they persuaded the Democrat House members with promises of patronage jobs, campaign contributions and ambassadorships. There were no bribes, no money changed hands, and their methods could never be traced to the president. *P. 687, Goodwin*

Among those House Democrats who came to the White House to talk with Lincoln was George Yeaman of Owensboro, the Unionist representative of the 2nd Congressional District of western Kentucky, who had voted no on the constitutional amendment in 1864.

Yeaman had been practicing law in Owensboro since 1852, was elected county judge in 1854 and represented Daviess County in the state legislature in 1861. A member of the Whig Party before the war, he was elected to Congress in 1862 as a Unionist, and had vigorously opposed the Emancipation Proclamation.

While there does not seem to be any written record of Lincoln’s private meeting with Yeaman, who reportedly told Lincoln he too was against slavery but exclaimed Kentucky and the South were “unready” for emancipation. He felt it would lead to enfranchisement of the Negro, which Kentuckians vigorously opposed. You’re not suggesting that we enfranchise colored people, do you Mr. President? If black Americans got the vote, what would be next? Universal suffrage? We’re just not ready, Yeaman asserted again.

“I’m just asking only that you disenthral yourself from the slave powers,” Lincoln said. “Getting a majority vote is going to be so very close,” the President said. “You see what you can do,” Lincoln told Yeaman as their discussion ended. *Lincoln movie script*

No one really knew how the Congressman from Owensboro would vote until the final seconds of the roll call, but his aye or nay would be one of the clinching votes. Knowing it would probably end his service in the House, Yeaman voted aye, and Lincoln won the biggest political battle of his Presidency.

The amendment was approved 119-56 with a margin of two votes, just as Lincoln had thought. Every Republican had voted for it, as well as 13 Democrats, who joined with four who voted for the amendment in June 1864.

The banished Thomas Pettit had arrived in Richmond, the Confederate capital, on Jan. 13 and was still there when the Thirteenth Amendment passed the House on Jan. 31, 1865. Pettit did not resume his editorial duties at the *Monitor* until May 1865, and was in Daviess County while the amendment was ratified by three-fourths of the states Dec. 6, 1865, and became effective 12 days later.

Legislators in Frankfort were in a state of desperation and confusion in February 1865. They were vehemently opposed to the action of Congress and the Conservatives and Democrats flatly refused to ratify the amendment.

“Resolutions of every character and discussion varied, now occupied the time of the lawmakers,” historian Merton Coulter wrote in his 1926 book *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky*. Coulter was a history professor at the University of Georgia for four decades and was widely known in the academic community of the South as a defender of segregation and white supremacy.

“Freeing the slaves would mean Negro suffrage, Negro equality and the prying fingers of the Federal government thrust into state affairs for ever more,” he wrote. “The Conservatives would have none of it and the Lincoln Republicans (considered Radicals) supported the amendment.”

In the Senate, John F. Fisk moved that the amendment be ratified and that Congress be asked to compensate the loyal slaveholders for the loss of their property. Former Governor James Robinson also submitted a proposal to ratify the amendment if Congress paid \$36 million for “all claims then existing and all that would arise from slavery and on condition the Federal government would remove all free Negroes from the state.” Gov. Bramlette did the same as Robinson. All proposals were rejected. The amendment “went to the way of all the world. “Dead, dead, is its fate,” The *Cincinnati Gazette* reported Feb. 25.

This was happening as the number of slaves in Kentucky and their value as “property” was plummeting. A state audit of 79 of 100 Kentucky counties showed 203,897 slaves in the state in 1864, valued at about \$34,179,246, an average of \$157 per slave. In 1865, those numbers had decreased to 125,850 slaves, worth \$5,726,209, an average of 45.50 per slave. *Cincinnati Gazette*. July 31, 1865

As weeks passed during the ratification process, slaves began moving from the South in large groups. Many of them flocked to such big cities of Louisville or Lexington, and crossed the river to Evansville, which for years before the war was a busy stopover on the Underground Railroad. Freed slaves began leaving the farms of Daviess County hoping to find work and a better life outside of Kentucky. The labor system in Daviess County was in dire straits. The word was already circulating about granting the Negroes the right to vote now that they were freedmen. White Kentuckians were angry and fearful about being the same legal footing with Negroes, while the former slaves were also unprepared for the sudden change.

In 1865, many Negroes cut themselves loose from all former connections and means of support wandering aimlessly toward towns and cities. *P. 340-341 Coulter*

Many white men in Daviess County balked at accepting that slavery was being abolished legally. They used force and violence to terrorize Negroes and keep them in a state of bondage. The Democrats preferred white supremacy and were determined to keep it. They still believed that Negroes were inferior and slavery was ordained by God.

Yeaman knew that he had probably sacrificed his future as a member of Congress but he was not afraid to defend his vote for the amendment. On March 21, the *Evansville Daily Journal* urged Yeaman to run for reelection and extolled his bravery. "The voting for that proposition while representing a slave holding constituency was an evidence of manly independence that deserves hearty endorsement."

The *Evansville* paper, which Pettit considered the "venerable organ of Indiana radicalism," said Yeaman had legislated for the best interests of his constituents and the country at large. "The man who seeks to perpetuate the institution of slavery and the strife and bitterness necessarily resulting from its perpetuation is not a true friend to the Government or Kentucky. Let no man in Kentucky be afraid to declare and to vote that the time has come to end forever the slavery agitation in this government and to accept the end of slavery and get used to a new system of labor and industry to which we all know and admit that we must come at last." *Evansville Daily Journal, March 21, 1865*

Yeaman announced his intention to run for reelection on April 6, 1865. "The events of the war have forced upon us another question, the question that will be the main one in the next elections in Kentucky," he said in a statement given to newspapers. "I mean the proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States prohibiting slavery. I have espoused that measure as being now the shortest road (aside from the success of our arms) to a permanent peace and will stand or fall with the judgment of the people on that measure. I will defer to a public discussion the reasons which I think now demand this measure." *Daily Journal, April 15, 1865*

Lee had surrendered his whole army at Appomattox on April 9, ending the war in Virginia. On Good Friday, April 14, the nation began the day filled with gladness, joy and exaltation. In many cities grand demonstrations celebrating the victory were occurring in the same hour an assassin was seeking his victim.

It was called "the blackest crime that had disgraced humanity since the Crucifixion," a headline noted. The news of the assassination of President Lincoln arrived by telegraph and word of mouth by steamboat or stagecoach in Kentucky and Indiana on Sunday, April 16, 1865. An *Evansville* news reporter dashed to the telegraph just as the worst report was officially confirmed, as the operator penned the lines on April 15: "Abraham Lincoln died this morning at 22 minutes past seven o'clock." Signed "Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War."

The common lead in most of the nation's newspapers on Monday was "a great calamity has befallen our nation." President Lincoln had been shot to death on Friday night, April 14, as he and his wife Mary were watching a play at Ford's Theater in Washington, and Secretary Seward and his son Fred were attacked in their home in the capital.

The *Evansville Daily Journal* was one of the first newspapers in the Midwest to receive the detailed story of the assassination, authorized by the War Department and signed by Edwin M. Stanton. Within 24 hours, the story was reported in daily newspapers in New York, Pittsburgh, Wheeling, Cincinnati, Louisville, Indianapolis, Terre Haute and St. Louis. It reached *Evansville* by telegraph and appeared on the front page of the *Journal's* Monday, April 17, edition. It was a lengthy and accurate account which stood the test of time and was repeated by historians many years later without sensation or dramatic flourishes.

One *Evansville* reporter was at a celebration in Terre Haute that night. "We retired early, and had scarcely finished breakfast in the morning, when we were appalled by the calamitous intelligence that the best and purest man of the nation, the man around whom centered almost

every hope of the patriot as well as of the traitor had been foully, cruelly, cowardly, traitorously assassinated in the presence of his wife and his friends.” *Daily Journal, April 17, 1865*

Suddenly the “paraphernalia of rejoicing” was removed from homes and public houses and replaced by “the sable hues of mourning took their place,” the Evansville reporter noted. All places of business were closed, flags lowered to half-mast and “a most fearful sense of the nation’s calamity pervaded every heart, mingled with indignation and despair.... Pained and sick of heart, we were glad when the hour for the train to depart had arrived, but all along the road, at every village, and almost every farm house, the same emblems of mourning and lamentation were manifest as if the land plague of Egypt had fallen on the land and every house had been called to mourn its first born.”

In Evansville, the *Daily Journal* reported: “After unparalleled military successes and the surrender everyone in Washington was jubilant and buoyant by the immediate termination of the terrible war” that desolated the land and “the speedy prevalence of peace” was “in a moment Saturday cast into the deepest gloom by the announcement that President Lincoln was dead.” *Ibid, Daily Journal*

“The reception of the news in this city is indescribable,” the Evansville paper reported. “Men were struck dumb almost with white lips and blanched cheeks whispered to their fellow. Can this be true? And as the startling news spread from lip to lip all business was instinctively suspended, places of business were closed and the insignia of mourning and woe was hung on every house.”

Within minutes after the news arrived, all the flags in the city and the boats at the wharf were lowered to half-mast. Guns were fired by military authorities every half hour from sunrise to sunset. Citizens clustered in small groups discussing the assassination. *Ibid, Daily Journal*

“No one could fail to observe that with the bitter grief that prevailed, a deep and terrible indignation mingled,” the *Daily Journal* reported. “But we hope order will be preserved and that no cause for reproach to our city will be given. If there are those in our midst who rejoice in their hearts of this fearful calamity to our nation, they should be careful to conceal it and those who have labored to teach that Abraham Lincoln was a “tyrant” should consider how far they are responsible for the ‘deep damnation of his taking off.’”

Ministers of churches were distributing handbills, calling the people to prayer. Churches were “unusually crowded, all eyes seemed in tears, a feeling of awe and terror and dread prevailed.” Mayor William Baker of Evansville issued a proclamation requesting that business be suspended, stores closed and the city be dressed in mourning.

Deeply solemn services were held in Rockport and Henderson. Main Street and many private residences in Rockport were draped in black, and a “life size portrait of Lincoln covered with the American flag and crape was put in a conspicuous place,” in the Spencer County town. A huge crowd filled the courthouse at a 4 p.m. and Col. William Wood, the same Union officer who came to the rescue of Owensboro in September 1862, “spoke feelingly of the occasion that brought the citizens together.” The Rockport city council proclaimed in a resolution that “the Republic has lost the man to whom all eyes were turned and in whom the proudest hopes were centered for a speedy return of peace and the restoration of the Union, but that we bow in humbled submission to the will of Him who holds in his hands the hearts of men and the destinies of nations.”

An editorialist for the Evansville paper commented, “There can be no doubt that the indiscriminate and wholesale abuse of Mr. Lincoln as a ‘tyrant,’ ‘a usurper,’ ‘a despot,’ a ‘perjurer’ and ‘faithless violator of promises’ had to do in spurring Booth to this crime which has blackened his memory forever. Individuals and newspapers that followed Lincoln while he was

alive with “vituperative abuse” are merely the seeking of an occasion to abuse (President) Johnson. Mr. Lincoln will hardly be cold in his grave before the very men who furnished his assassin with a motive for *his taking off*, will be whetting a knife for some miscreant to take the life of the new president.” Daily Journal, April 17, 1865

Owensboro was without a newspaper during editor Pettit’s banishment to the South. Lincoln had given the young newspaper editor his freedom, enabling Pettit to leave Richmond and return to Daviess County. Pettit was traveling through eastern Kentucky on his way to Owensboro when he learned about the surrender at Appomattox and Lincoln’s death. All in his group of travelers were saddened by Lincoln’s death, Pettit wrote later. “The sorrow manifested was depicted upon the countenances of each member of our party,” he wrote. “Even the most violent rebels --- those who had fought against the Government for years when he was the head --- regarded it, as one of them expressed himself to me, ‘as more fatal under existing circumstances than any calamity that could befall all the Southern people.’”

These words came from same young man who six months earlier had said in the heat of a presidential election campaign that the birth of Abraham Lincoln was “the darkest day of our national history,” adding “the few years which he has sat as Executive have accomplished the ruin of the country.”

Upriver in Hancock County, Kentucky, that same Monday, three memorial services were held in Hawesville, that bastion of Confederate sympathizers. The Rev. Samuel Helm gave an eloquent funeral sermon to a large and attentive audience at 11 a.m. at the Hawesville Methodist Episcopal South Church, and Maj. Nathan Lightfoot, the county’s new provost marshal, spoke at the courthouse. As the *Cannelton Reporter* noted, Lightfoot told his once war-divided listeners. “This is the appropriate time to cultivate mutual feelings of love and friendship.” The Rev. James Brown spoke to an overflowing crowd at 3 p.m. at the Hawesville Baptist Church. State troops marched in solemn procession to and from the services bearing the U.S. flag.

In the April 20 edition of the *Cannelton Reporter*, a correspondent from Hawesville described his county’s reaction to Lincoln’s death. “The old Southern Rights man, the returned Confederate soldier, the anti-war man and the anti-emancipationist all joined hands saying that we mourn the death of Mr. Lincoln as a deep national calamity. We had tried him and had confidence in his great integrity, generosity and ability. We do not believe there is one intelligent citizen in Hancock County who does not deeply denounce his murder and sincerely mourn his loss.” The “tired of war” residents of Hancock County believed they had lost a friend to whom all were “looking to bring our country back to its once happy, prosperous condition.” *Cannelton Reporter, April 20 and April 27, 1865*

Walker Taylor was in Hawesville when the war ended. He got the news of President Lincoln’s death on that black Monday in April. Taylor had accepted military defeat with honor and grace, and was genuinely saddened by the murder of Lincoln, mourning the death of the man that he had once proposed kidnapping. The major issued a final public order on April 17. It was an advisory to all Kentuckians and the soldiers of the 10th Kentucky Partisan Rangers in Hancock County and elsewhere in the Green River region of western Kentucky. “I consider it the duty of everyone regardless of what may have happened in the last four years to do all that is possible to restore peace, quiet and confidence in the country. Any propositions that General (John) Palmer (the new Union commandant of Kentucky in 1865) may make, may be fully relied upon.” *Cannelton Reporter, April 27, 1865*

Gen. Palmer, who had succeeded Burbridge as commandant of the Union Army in Kentucky, said from Louisville, on April 15, 1865, that he had learned of the death of President Lincoln by

telegraph. “The purest man of the age has fallen and the whole nation which was rejoicing over the prospects of speedy peace is mourning. Let the people of Kentucky disappoint the miscreant who may involve them in bloodshed and strife by conducting themselves with calmness and moderation. Avoid all heated conversations and imprudent expressions. Let us unite in every means for preserving order. The wicked need not rejoice nor the patriotic despond. The government will still go on and as great as the calamity is, the country will accomplish its high destiny.” *Evansville Daily Journal, May 15, 1865*

A large public meeting at Louisville where Gov. Bramlette praised Lincoln as “savior of the nation,” and confessed that Lincoln’s opponents had been wrong. On the Wednesday, the day of the president’s funeral, bells tolled throughout the nation. The funeral procession in Louisville was three miles long. The Kentucky Legislature, another of Lincoln’s political enemies, conceded that the president had shown “high qualities of honesty, clemency, patriotism and ability.” *P. 257, Coulter*

Sixty years later, Southern historian Merton Coulter wrote that in the five days after Lee’s surrender, the sympathy of Kentucky was profoundly touched. “A great transformation seems almost mysteriously to have swept over the people when the word came that Lincoln was dead. From their customary attitude of condemnation and a vilification, the people of Kentucky, now turned to honoring and praising. They speedily forgot the past four years of opposition to the president who now lay dead, and they have never sought to recall it.” *Ibid p. 257*

The post-war nation were stunned by the assassination. An American president had never been murdered in the United States. It was a tragedy that changed the course of history for white people in the Border States and the South almost instantly, and black Americans for more than 100 years.

As he had toured the war torn Confederate capital of Richmond on April 2, 1865, Lincoln was asked by Gen. Godfrey Weitzel, the Union commander in the former Confederate capital, what should be done to the “conquered people” of the South? “If I were in your place, I’d let ‘em up easy, let ‘em up easy,” Lincoln replied.

But the Confederates’ surrender at Appomattox did not mean peace in the land that had not known peace in the past four years, as Coulter said. “Kentuckians may have beat their chest in sorrow, but evil days which the state had so often complained were yet to come in still greater numbers. Military interference continued to show no signs of ending and the question of slavery was still to be answered.” *P. 257-258, Merton Coulter*

The *Daily Journal* in Evansville added, “It was rather remarkable how eloquently the Democratic newspapers plead for mercy toward the rebels and traitors of the South. They have pleaded and prayed for them though this entire war, and they propose to maintain this consistency to the end. Justice finds no favor in the eyes of these saints, whose calumnies against Abraham Lincoln armed and inspired his assassin. Their sole cry is for mercy and forgiveness. Those who love their country everywhere and those who hate traitors and treason demand that justice shall accompany mercy.” *Daily Journal, May 10, 1865*

There was a reckoning in store for the guerrilla gangs still terrorizing the state of Kentucky. A circular posted by Gen. Palmer on May 6, 1865 announced: “It is well-known now that all the robbers and murderers who have so long harassed the people profess to belong to some rebel command, and now that they are likely to meet the punishment due their crimes, they attempt to escape justice and retain their ill-gotten gains by seeking to be included in some rebel command.”

There can be no escape for them, Palmer said. "Every man now in arms in this department shall be driven out. He must yield himself up to abide such scrutiny of his conduct as will develop his history. If he has been a merely a soldier governed by the rules of honorable warfare, he shall have honorable terms. If he is a robber or murderer, if he has engaged in the assassination of Federal soldiers, or attempted to destroy women and children by throwing cars from the railroad, he shall be tried and regularly convicted. He shall be punished, and no commission, real or forged, shall save him. While we have our muskets in our hands, the interests of justice and humanity demand that such men be exterminated." *The Daily Journal*, May 10, 1865

George Yeaman's opponent would be Democrat Burwell Clark Ritter of Russellville, a 50-year-old inn keeper and farmer who had served terms in the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1842 and 1850.

Thomas Pettit did everything he could to sabotage Yeaman's campaign, but the *Evansville Daily Journal* was in Yeaman's corner, supporting his struggle and fighting the subversive tactics the conservatives in the Second Congressional District used to defeat him. "The *Owensboro Monitor* is tramping up excuses to prevent its candidate for Congress from stumping the District with the Honorable George Yeaman, his opponent."

The Owensboro newspaper urged Ritter to withdraw his joint appointments with Judge Yeaman because soldiers attended those appearances with him. "It does not intimate that the soldiers disturb anybody or in any way intimidate anyone but their presence so offensive to the conservative gentlemen that they cannot listen to a friendly discussion between Congressional candidates with any satisfaction or composure," the *Daily Journal* declared. The soldiers may have accompanied Yeaman to protect him from attacks by men who opposed the Congressman's vote for the Thirteenth Amendment.

"The Monitor has satisfied us by its advice and complaints that its friends had laid plans to prevent Mr. Yeaman from speaking to the people by adoption of the old method of hooting down and refusing a hearing to those who do not worship at the shrine of slavery. We do not blame the editor of the Monitor from being sensitive in any way to the presence of soldiers. Their presence must necessarily call up unpleasant reminiscences to him but we cannot think the people of the Second Congressional District will be deceived in his attempt to withdraw his candidate from this canvass." *Evansville Daily Journal*, June 26, 1865.

On July 31, 1865, the *Daily Journal* made the best case for Kentucky ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment. "In order to protect and preserve this small pecuniary interest small in comparison with other interests the growth and prosperity of Kentucky is to be retarded and her prospects forever blighted," the *Evansville* paper commented. "It will be a burning disgrace to the people of that Old Commonwealth who have always been noted for their political sagacity and eminent politicians and statesmen to be forced to do that which is so clearly to her interest. By accepting the Constitutional amendment they gracefully adapt themselves to the situation of affairs and materially aid in advancing a gigantic social and political revolution in behalf of humanity and civilization. By refusing to endorse the amendment and thus throwing herself before the wheels of the car of progress, Kentucky may retard and check its advance but only for a season. It will roll on and over all opposition and the Kentucky will find herself a mangled and crushed wreck, writhing in its track.

"*The amendment is sure to become a part of the Constitution.* By opposing it to the bitter end, Kentucky only disorganizes her own system of labor, discourages and demoralizes her

laborers and utterly ruins her industrial interests for years to come. By adopting it her slave labor will prove more profitable as free labor; the Negroes, instead of running off and become vagabonds in the cities and towns will go quietly to work on the plantations and the whole state will hum with a busy and thriving industry. The people realize this fact and would act accordingly, were it not for a set of politicians who have gained their notoriety and positions by a blind worship of slavery and who are so identified with the institution that they must inevitably disappear from the public view and perish when it perishes. Hence they are straining every nerve to have the people retain that upon which their hope of office is based. But will not the people look to their own interests and vote down both the politicians and their pet hobby?"

The Evansville paper led with an editorial on Election Day, "In many respects the most important election ever held in the state of Kentucky takes place today. The issue is order or confusion, progress or decay, freedom or slavery, peace or war...The importance of a right decision and the fatal consequences attending a wrong decision have been portrayed to the people as plainly as words could do it. The disastrous effects of a blind adherence to the slave code of the state upon the laboring element in it and upon which it depends almost entirely for substance and comfort has faithfully been pointed out by both speakers and press. If Kentuckians choose the worse part, they do it with their eyes open and must not whine when the consequences they have brought upon themselves bear heavily even to the crushing out of all prosperity and peace. Life and death have been set before them. If they choose death rather than life they should at least have the nerve to die pluck and not complain of the Union men and the Administration for not warding off the evils they persisted in bringing upon themselves."

In the days before the August 1865 election, Thomas Pettit said he regarded Yeaman as "a gentleman of talent and great worth" but refused to endorse his bid for reelection. Pettit said he "deeply regretted" not being able to support Yeaman "without doing violence to my conscientious convictions of the proper course for Kentucky, "

He added, "I regret this difference more especially for the personal favor shown me in my time of need, "It had been Yeaman who had made the kind and successful effort to get President Lincoln to rescind Pettit's order of banishment.

Pettit's opposition to Yeaman never mattered. His recent notoriety had preceded him, and Pettit was not permitted to vote on August 7. The Federal government again sent judges and army troops to control the local voting. Every judge at the polls was opposed to the Conservative ticket, Pettit said in his opinion column on Wednesday, Aug. 9, 1865, paper. "The military was active, armed and equipped and ready for any emergency... The Yeaman men, no matter whether they had been active sympathizers with the rebellion heretofore or not, had little difficulty in casting their votes, while those who preferred Ritter and their intense loyalty during the war had never been called into question, found many impediments, and some excluded all together," Pettit complained.

Citizens were arrested at the polls and sent to an Army guard house, some for inquiring whether they were entitled to vote, "some because they voted and others because they didn't vote," Pettit claimed. He suggested to the "powers that be" that "hereafter rather than going to the trouble and expense of holding elections, appoint the respective officers in the state who would be about as acceptable with few exceptions to the people as those probably chosen in the election just passed. We judge that the election throughout the district and over the whole state was conducted in the same manner in which the race in Owensboro was but the miniature."

Pettit added, "The case in this district will not be more than a fraction over one half the vote it could have polled. This is, of course, attributable to the interference of the military authorities which so far as Daviess County is concerned was shameful in the extreme."

In Owensboro, soldiers were standing on each side of the door at each precinct until the polls closed, the *Monitor* reported. "These soldiers themselves did not challenge voters, but their mere presence was sufficient to prevent persons from going to the polls and was in direct violation of the recent act of Congress upon the subject of military interference with the election."

The precinct judges of the election refused to allow people to vote even after they had expressed a readiness to comply with all the requirements of the law. "Several persons were arrested for merely offering to vote while others were allowed to come forward and take the oath and vote and then were arrested for doing so," according to Pettit. "This appears to us to be the most unreasonable ---what else can a man do than to comply with the law and with military orders and then votes --- and how ridiculously absurd is it to arrest a person after he has complied with all that is required of him." *Monitor, Aug. 18, 1865*

Pettit was one of those people. His notoriety had preceded him. He had attempted to vote at the poll in the Upper Town precinct but was denied because the judges knew he had been banished for being disloyal. When Pettit told the judges that his banishment had been rescinded by "Lincoln's own hand", they still refused to let him vote. After he had been turned away, Pettit walked outside the polling place and stood in the street for 15 minutes, expecting soldiers to arrest him, but they never came. He returned to the newspaper office and remained there awaiting arrest. Again no one came and he was left alone.

The next day, Pettit posted two notices on the door of his newspaper office. The first said "No credit allowed here" and the other, "All military officers with hostile intentions are positively prohibited admittance," both of which, he added, were to "be obeyed not only in spirit but to the very letter."

Despite having been denied the right to vote, Pettit was more than satisfied with the results of the August 1865 election. "The majority of Democrats in the next Legislature will be two to one, thus securing Kentucky for two more years from the rule of fanatics and radicals," the young editor crowed in the Aug. 18 edition of his paper. "The Constitutional amendment we now think is a dead thing as far as Kentucky is concerned," he said. *Monitor, Aug. 18, 1865*

"In the Second District, the majority against Mr. Yeaman is about 1, 500," the *Monitor* reported prematurely and incorrectly. The *Monitor* was right in stating Ritter carried nine out of 12 counties with Christian County a standoff. Official results showed that Yeaman won that county by a narrow margin 783-772

Yeaman lost the election by 1,188 votes. Ritter finished with 6,974 votes; Yeaman had 5,786, according to the final results reported in the *Monitor* Sept. 13, *Monitor, Sept. 13, 1865, and Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, Sept. 7, 1865*

Yeaman was defeated in Daviess County 759 to 381 votes, but won in all of the Owensboro precincts by a margin of 216 to Ritter's 176. His opponent from Russellville carried six of the seven county precincts which included Curdsville, Vanover, Knottsville, Boston, Murray, Yelvington and Oakford.

The Yelvington precinct went 88 to 1 for Ritter, for the biggest sweep in the county. Ritter beat Yeaman 144 to 44, in Knottsville and in Curdsville by a 65-17 vote. *Monitor, Aug. 18, 1865, Sept. 13, 1865*

"The vote cast in this district will not be more than a fraction over one half of the vote it could have polled," the *Monitor* reported. "This is of course attributable to the interference of the

military authorities which as far as Daviess County was concerned was shameful in the extreme.”

Despite his distinguished record of local public service as a legislator and judge, Yeaman’s vote to pass the Thirteenth Amendment in Washington obviously hurt his bid to return to Congress and lost him support of the slave holding citizens of rural Daviess County.

Yeaman was appointed Ambassador to Denmark by President Johnson. He left Owensboro with his family in October 1865 and served in his new position from 1865 to 1870. He resigned in 1870, returned to the United States and settled in New York City, where he lectured on constitutional law at Columbia College. He died in Jersey City, N.J., in February 1908.

In spring 1865, Pettit had conversations with several paroled Confederate soldiers who had returned to their homes in Daviess County. “They report a sad demoralization of the Negroes of the South who are fast emerging” into the life of free men and women,” The Monitor editor wrote. “We are glad to chronicle that the feeling manifested by the farmers of this our section is that (former slaves) shall either go to work, join the Army or migrate to Indiana where we hope there are open arms to receive them, by our good neighbors of that state.” Better they go to Indiana than stay in Kentucky, the Monitor said, because “our farmers will not tolerate these colored individuals’ laziness and thieving.” *Monitor, May 31, 1865*

During the process of ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, Pettit’s newspaper realized the reality of the times. “The institution of slavery is virtually abolished on this continent,” the Monitor stated. “The irrepressible conflict between free labor and slave labor has come and slave labor has gone down. To this also the Southern people submit. On this point they accept the decision of the war and they do so with reluctance and regret. It is but just to them to say that in most cases, their sorrow is for the sudden upheaval of their institutions and the fate which threatens that unhappy race they have protected so long, than for the loss of the money value of their slaves.” *Monitor Aug. 13, 1865*

What will become of four million freed slaves? Pettit asked. “We take it for granted that the Southern people are going as soon as possible to have a regular labor system, as other people and that they are not going to depend upon the shiftless services of the Negro. They will fill their country with white men. They will offer to European immigrants’ better homes and prospects than any other people in the world. The North will cease to be the great and almost the only receptacle of the immigrant. Every trade and every species of manufacturing will set up their establishments in the South. The conservative men of the North --- men of mechanical genius, capital and skill men unspoiled by the by the malaria of abolition politics --- will move South and add to their own and to Southern prosperity.” *Monitor, Sept. 13, 1865*

In September 1865, the first noted evidence of a growing local labor crisis appeared as farmers of Daviess County prepared to harvest their crops. There was a critical shortage of farm workers that needed to be addressed quickly. A writer identifying himself only as “The Farmer,” penned a letter to the editor which appeared in the *Monitor* on Sept. 20.

“Many persons daily make the inquiry, will there be a half crop of tobacco raised in this and adjoining counties? A moment’s reflection and the question can be easily answered. At the beginning of the present season, labor was scarce, and could be had only at fabulous prices, consequently the farmers, a majority of whom were small, declined to take the risk of high price labor to cultivate tobacco, but preferred to curtail their crop by a third or half of what they formerly raised. This, of course, lessened the tobacco crop very much in this county.”

The farmers also had suffered other setbacks, according to the anonymous scribe. Heavy rains in the spring and summer had destroyed the tobacco crop “in many localities” in the county

and seriously damaged the corn crop. "What is true of this county is more or less true of adjoining counties and in a great measure true of the whole tobacco growing district of the state," the writer said. "After considerable inquiry and observation, I am inclined to the opinion that it will not be more than one fifth of the crop of '62 and 63' raised in this county this year, and that of very inferior quality."

The writer blamed the farmers' problem on the freed men. "There is plenty of labor in the county and in the whole state but the great difficulty seems to be to get this labor. You can see any number of able bodied Negro men and boys walking the streets of every city and town in the state, perfectly idle, while the farmers are needing their services and offering large monthly or yearly wages but all to no effect.

"Sambo is taking it easy without any regard to or thought of providing for his comfort during the coming winter. This county and the whole state is greatly in need of this element of labor, and unless some means can be adopted by which it can be made useful, the farming interest of the county and state will be hurt seriously, but we trust only temporarily, injured. If the agricultural interest is allowed to drag and suffer, all other branches of business must necessarily suffer in proportion. You see many farms advertised for rent or sale, and great many allowed remaining idle, and the universal reason is 'can't get labor.'" *The Farmer, Monitor, Sept. 20, 1865*

As Reconstruction of the South began, tempers flared among riled Kentuckians when the Thirteenth Amendment became operative on Dec. 18, 1865. Further opposition to the new amendment of the Constitution was useless, and dead in every respect. The state plunged into political and societal chaos. In January 1866, one observer said that "never before in Kentucky politics were in such confusion as now."

In an attempt to manage the confusion in Kentucky, the Federal government extended the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (commonly known as the Freedmen's Bureau) to the state on Dec. 26, 1865. The bureau had been established as a part of the U.S. War Department and initiated by President Lincoln in March 1863, to aid and administer to the former slaves for one year after the end of the war.

A state headquarters was established in Louisville, and activities of the bureau were spread out over the state. Food and fuel were being distributed among the needy. The Freedman Bureau Act of July 16, 1865, gave the organization more power to take the freedmen under its protection, exercise judicial functions and use the military to enforce its orders. Military posts were in Lexington, Louisville, Maysville and Covington and other towns where small groups of soldiers were spread out over the states. *Ibid, p. 340-341*

The most helpful service the Bureau sought to perform was to stabilize labor conditions which was the biggest problem in Daviess County and the rest of the state. There were large numbers of freedmen who felt they had no place to go. They decided to come to terms with their former masters, agreeing to live in their same old shanties and receive money for their labor. In some areas, scales of wages were established and contracts with freemen were systemized. *P. 342 Coulter*

However, it was impossible to extend this cooperative system of labor across the state, once the Freedmen Bureau assumed total control over the Negro workmen, and supervised the making of their contracts with his former master. Whites resented what they called the Bureau's interference.

The Bureau quickly became more unpopular throughout the state when it brought law suits against former slave-owners to recover wages from them for the wives and children of Negro soldiers on the ground that enlistment had conferred freedom.

What further muddied the water, uneducated Negroes lacked any knowledge of good citizenship and stood in urgent need of sound direction. White farmers no longer had any control of their former slaves. Whites complained when blacks stopped working when they pleased. Their newly required freedom had made them lazy, white farmers said.

Negroes' reliability as workers was questioned. The former slaves had no understanding of how to support themselves or their families if they had one. Soon the strong foundation of cooperation and understanding between former master and former slave was destroyed, and the whites blamed it on the Freedmen's Bureau.

On March 7, 1866, the *Monitor* ran an essay from a recent issue of the *Louisville Commercial Gazette*, which expressed why many farmers in Kentucky had such a gloomy view of the future of the state.

"Always accustomed to slavery, they see in the abolition of that institution future ruin following in the wake of present disaster. Their conclusion is, let us hope both, illogical and erroneous. The system of involuntary servitude was far more a boon to the slave than a benefit to the master and after the country shall have recovered from the double shock given to its prosperity by a radical revolution of the labor system and the annihilation of a very large amount of property. There are plausible reason for concluding that the solid progress of the people in a pecuniary point of view, will be rather advanced than retarded, however much the Negro may suffer by being thrust into for him, the abnormal condition of freedom.

"It is not at all improbable that agriculturists will, after experimenting with the freedman as a laborer be compelled by reason and his inherent vagabondism, to resort to white labor. This will infallibly be the result if Freedman's Bureau agents by their conduct and official acts impress upon the Negro the idea that he is to be protected in idleness and insubordination."

The farmer would have to pay his laborer, whether white or black, the value of the work he did and that only, the *Gazette* noted. "And that would be difficult for many farmers, Heretofore it has been the case that many large slaveholders scarcely maintained the expenses of their establishments, and in some instances within the observation of all of us, they failed to do even this. The day has gone by when the laborer was to be well fed and clothed and comfortably lodged, no matter where the amount of work done by him would pay for these necessaries or not and what is still more to the point, the day has also gone by when men and women, and great groups of children, too old or too young to be serviceable, are to be comfortably provided for. It is a fact capable of demonstration that under the compensated labor system especially with the aid of improved machinery, far greater results may be attained with the same capital than under the patriarchal system of slavery. So much by way of consolation to farmers who have been deprived of their slave labor! *The darkest cloud may have its silver lining.*" *Monitor, March 7, 1866*

In a commentary, Pettit's paper called for a convention of Kentucky farmers to work quickly to change the labor system. "As we have before said, we must take things as we find them, and make the best bargain possible. Slavery is no more in Kentucky, and Negro Bureaus are offered to us as the substitute. The question for us to decide is, 'will we accept of this Yankee contrivance or set on foot such organizations as will furnish us intelligent and enterprising white labor. We want labor that is wholly independent of the bayonet and Yankee officials who look only to self aggrandizement, a system of labor that can be depended upon in any emergency, and

one which both parties will be benefited, and the resources of this Green River country fully developed. To such a system of labor must we look for such a result; and with that in view we present our readers with the above extract from the *Louisville Commercial Gazette* and recommend the subject to all, with hope that measures may soon be devised to secure this most important end. If we mistake not, there are many in our community who are deeply interested in this matter and anxious to effect an organization by which such labor may be introduced without delay.

“We have no time to lose and everything to gain by vigorous and determined action in this direction, and once accomplished we can build railroads, open our coal and iron mines, establish foundries and factories and give employment to a class which will both enrich the community and ennoble and dignify labor in all the departments of life.” *Monitor, March 7, 1866*

In February 1866, while Daviess County was struggling to find a way to create a new labor system, Owensboro got a surprising gift from Frankfort. The Kentucky legislature passed legislation incorporating and granting Owensboro the powers and privileges of a city. The people of Owensboro passed the charter by a vote of 270-7 and held a council election the first Monday in April.

A prominent steam boat captain E.S. Ayres was elected mayor. James Kennady, H.C. McCreery and Jacob Deal elected to represent the first ward, and William Shelby, Benjamin Bransford and George Brown, the second ward. T. S. Hutchison was elected marshal. The dividing line between the two wards was St. Ann Street.

Among the new laws the city council was obliged to enforce were forbidding horses, cattle, hogs and other animals wandering the streets. The owners would be fined. They also outlawed public intoxication and quarreling, immorality, lewdness, idleness, and vagrancy. And the marshal had the power to “suppress” gaming businesses and houses of ill repute, and arrest their operators.

Tragically, the 58-year-old Mayor Ayres died of a sudden illness a few days after the election “Among his fellow citizens he was proverbial for his liberality and unselfishness and beloved by all who knew him,” the *Monitor* eulogized Ayres. “In his death the city has lost an able executive officer, the community a generous and valued citizen and his family bereft of a faithful and affectionate husband and father.” *Monitor, April 25, 1866*

Businesses houses and mail packets were decorated with testable and appropriate garb of respect to the memory of one who was loved and esteemed in life and regretted in death. After a decent period of mourning, the City Council returned to doing the new city’s business with W.S. Shelby presiding. In a special election, Kennady replaced Ayres and served for the next seven years as mayor.

On June 6, 1866, Pettit published his wish list for the City of Owensboro. “First, we want a telegraph line to Louisville so that we can hold a short quick conversation with the rest of mankind.” He thought the city need a hundred houses as stores and dwelling for mechanics and residence in the suburbs. He wanted the streets graded and graveled and the ponds drained, ravines filled up for their inroads arrested, an extension of the city wharf to accommodate steamers which a population of 10,000 in five years would demand. He wanted the court house rebuilt and the lot tastefully improved; the city gas light system extended over the city which would reduce the number of police and reduce city expenses. At that same time, and most important to Pettit, the *Monitor* began promoting construction of railroads to Calhoun and Russellville. He thought a rail road to Russellville would connect a Louisville and Nashville with

a railway spurt to Memphis. The thought it would increase property values for land owners along the both railroads by 50 percent.

Pettit also complained to the mayor and city council about a problem in his backyard. “The condition of the alley in the rear of the Monitor office is filthy beyond description and the proper authorities should see that it is cleansed. A hog, in passing it yesterday hopped by on three feet, using the other to hold his nose, so insufferable was the stench.” *Monitor June 6, 1865*

“The worst period of violence in Daviess County outside of the Civil War itself, occurred during the three-year period after the war, as the wartime factions of Unionists and pro-Confederates battled for control of the county,” Michael Crane, a professor of history at the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, contends in a well-documented, 13-page article he wrote for an online edition of *Ohio Valley History* in 2002: “Both groups wanted to maintain black subservience, but conflict splintered the community as white and black residents reshaped the post-war landscape.” *P. 20-21, Crane*

Crane adds, “Political struggles in this period included violence and intimidation as returning Confederates and their home front sympathizers sought retribution against Unionists and Union soldiers. For returning Confederates and their supporters, though they had lost the war on the battlefield, they could defeat their foes in the end by controlling the county’s politics and thus the future of its race relations. To accomplish this end, they bullied, beat and murdered those who stood in their way.” *Crane, p. 21*

Running as conservatives, Democrats in Daviess County would score a big victory in the election in 1866. “Violence in the weeks leading up to the election by ex-Confederates seemed to play a role in ensuring victory at the polls. In 1866, former Confederates, soldiers, guerrillas and politicians maneuvered to gain control of the Democratic Party which was still in Unionists’ hands at the end of the war.” *Ibid, p. 21*

The Democrats, who in general had maintained their proslavery stance during the war, already had the political support of the majority of the community by the war’s end because of the Republican Party’s support of emancipation and the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment, according to Crane. “The uncompensated loss of such a vast amount of personal property in the form of slaves shifted the loyalties of all but the staunchest Unionist to the Democrat Party,” Crane noted in this analysis.

The Democrats, mostly all ex-Confederates, sent a clear message to former black Union soldiers that no civil rights act would protect them or give them due process in a court of law in Daviess County. And the white men wanted to reestablish social boundaries that made sure that emancipation has dismantled. The Confederates went to war to protect their way of life which before the war included black subservience.

It was in this period of early 1866, as the labor system problem worsened and violence against former slaves increased, Pettit reported that A.M. Mayo of Owensboro had been appointed superintendent of the Daviess County branch of the Bureau.

Commending Mayo for “his well-known energy of character,” Pettit’s paper said he was sure while Mayo would “faithfully act in the discharge of his duties toward the employer, he will unquestionably make Sambo comply with his part of the bargain, as he understands thoroughly the character of the blacks and what is best for them, and as his services of superintendent has to be located among us, we do not know any gentleman in the community who will render greater satisfaction to all concerned than Mr. Mayo.”

The bureau could provide freedmen with food, and assistance in building their own schools and providing legal assistance. But the Bureau could not provide blacks with political power. And the worst cases of violence began in 1866 as Mayo assumed his duties.

Andrew Fuqua, a black soldier recruited in Owensboro, returned to Daviess County and was disruptive in a public place. A white man in the store “ordered the Negro to cease his impudence, and on refusing to do so, Fuqua was shot instantly dead.” Fuqua’s killer was never brought to justice. *Monitor, March 7, 1866*

A slave named Aaron had been recruited and enlisted in the 108th Colored Infantry in 1864. He was one of the slaves of Dr. A.D. Hill, who the *Monitor* said was “a good master, and attentive to the wants and necessities of his slaves. A good and zealous Union man, Hill had told Aaron, “If you wish to go into the army I cannot prevent you and if you will inform me when you want to go, I will go with you to the recruiting office and assist you in any way I can.” When Aaron enlisted and got his uniform and gun he persuaded some comrades to go with him to Hill’s house intending to kill the doctor, the *Monitor* reported.

When the doctor heard about the plan, he fled. “Aaron with his party called at the house, asked for the doctor but did not find him. He cursed and abused Hill’s wife, his comrades shot their guns and swore they intended to kill the doctor,” the *Monitor* reported. Aaron and his companions left.

After his service in the Army, Aaron returned to Owensboro on May 2, 1866. When Dr. Hill saw him the next day, they locked horns immediately. They exchanged several blows, a pistol in Hill’s hand accidentally went off, the *Monitor* reported, and Aaron fled. Dr. Hill fired his weapon at the former slave hitting him in the leg, wounding him slightly.

According to the *Monitor*, “A crowd of excited people, among whom were some of our best and most worthy citizens, all of whom were familiar with the circumstances of the Negro’s former treatment of Dr. Hill, and gathering around the Negro clamored for a ‘rope,’ ‘a rope,’ ‘hang him, hang! him and would no doubt in a few moments have sent this veteran to his long home at a rope’s end if it had not been for Dr. Hill appealing to the crowd not to do so. He told the crowd about the conduct of Aaron toward himself and his family when the Negro soldiers had come to the Hill house in 1864.

An agent of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Owensboro, believed to be Mayo, found Aaron before the mob could get to him, and wisely put him in jail. Later that night, Aaron was released and sent “away from this place which evidently would not be a wholesome spot for him in the future,” as the *Monitor* reported.

“It is useless for one to say that the community here justified Dr. Hill in his cause, and would have justified him still more if he had shot the Negro dead in his tracks,” Thomas Pettit’s paper commented. “There is no hard or cruel treatment to the Negro in this community, nor did such a case ever occur here within our knowledge, but the Negroes and their friends understand fully, and may as well, if they do not understand, that when a conflict here takes place between a Negro and a white man, that in ninety nine cases out of a hundred, the negro will go under.” *Monitor May 9, 1866*

White men also warned male Negroes to desist from even talking about making sexual advances toward white women, but that did not stop it from happening. On May 20, 1866, a young Negro man named Tom Conyer was hanged in the courthouse yard for allegedly soliciting sex from a teenage white girl on a street in Owensboro.

Conyer was presented before Judge Washburn during an examining trial to determine whether the charge would be referred to the grand jury. While Conyer was being taken to jail,

someone put a rope over his head. As he was being led away, his assailant threw the rope over the limb of a tree in the courthouse yard. It was said that the father of the girl drew him up.

A detailed eyewitness account of the lynching was given later by Mayo of the Freedmen Bureau. He said Conyer had offered the 14-year-old girl a dime to have sexual relations with him. When she refused, Conyer ran a head of her, stopped her and asked her again. A young white man, Napoleon Collier, who had witnessed the whole event then interceded on the girl's behalf, warning Conyer to "stop his importunities."

Conyer was arrested that night and placed in jail. In a preliminary hearing the next day, both the girl and Collier testified that Conyer made the proposition. The court would not allow Conyer to testify for himself because he was black and Kentucky law did not permit Negroes to testify against whites. Judge Washburn ruled that the case merited a full trial for the offense of detaining a white woman with the intention to commit rape on her and to have intercourse with her against her will. The judge set Conyer's bond at \$1,000.

It was Deputy Sheriff Walter McDaniel who threw a noose around Conyer's neck, and pulled him through an awaiting mob, as Crane described it. McDaniel handed the rope to Joseph Goynes, the girl's father, who dragged Conyer to "a locust tree, threw the end over the limb and drew him up front of "a hundred or more witnesses." *Crane, p. 24*

"He was suspended for twenty to thirty minutes before he was cut down and carried into the jail yard where an inquest was held over his body," Pettit's newspaper reported.

According to Crane's research, Mayo claimed later to have tried to stop the lynching, but McDaniel, a man named Joseph Norris, and "several others pulled their pistols on me and told me to leave or I would be killed.' I also understood that they said whoever cut the Negro down should be hung on the limb, Mayo said. The boy hung about twenty minutes... I could not induce any of them (freed people to lay hold of him as they said they heard that the first one that touched him should be hung." The judge, a lawyer and a bystander later took the body away," according to Mayo." There would be other such illegal hangings in the courthouse yard in the years to come.

Under the headline, "Mob Law in Owensboro, Negro Hung on Public Square," the *Monitor* printed a brief and vague report of the lynching on the front page on May 23, 1866. Pettit's paper identified the Negro man as "Tom," described his alleged transgression and mentioned Judge Washburn's name. No names of the mob were reported. The only other detail reported by the *Monitor* noted that Tom's body hanged from the limb 20 to 30 minutes. *P. 24, Crane*

Pettit covered up the brutality of the murder of Conyer and seemed more concerned about the damage to Owensboro's public image, admonishing residents of the town to cease taking the law into their own hands. "While every citizen will condemn to the utmost rigor of the law, any person who may be guilty of such a crime, we desire to call the attention of our people to the fact that the reputation of our city will suffer terribly from the recurrence of such scenes of mob violence in our midst. The Negro was in the hands of civil officers, had been tried and sent on for further trial. It is no use to go through the mockery of civil trials, if after the verdict the prisoner is to be dealt with by a mob. We might as well abolish all courts altogether." *Monitor, May 23, 1866*

Mayo did not last long in his position as head of the Bureau in Daviess County, especially after his failure to protect Conyer. Some of most violent attacks occurred on Mayo's watch, and complaints were made to the Freedmen Bureau in Louisville.

His administration of the office was investigated by the inspector general's office of the Bureau, which "found that Mayo was not qualified either mentally, morally, or physically for the

position of Superintendent of the Bureau," according to Freedmen Bureau files at the National Archives in Washington.

In his report, Capt. William H. Merrill said to Levi Burnett, acting assistant adjutant general for the U.S. Army in Louisville, "Mr. Mayo is very intemperate in his habits, and violent in disposition and his conduct has been such as to make the Bureau odious, and instead of being the freedmen's friend, its affairs under him were so administered as to make it an object of terror to them, and as such was feared and avoided,"

It also appeared upon investigation that Mayo operated his office of the Bureau strictly to advance his personal interests and making money for himself, the latter consideration apparently controlling Mayo in the management of affairs in his county.

The inspector questioned James Ware, his brother, Mr. Wing, Capt. Grissom and a "number of freedmen" about Mayo. They were unanimous in their statements regarding Mayo's character and official transactions, and they all concur in the opinion that this sole object was to make money when he could use the authority of his position to do so. He was also compelling parents to give up their children and sell them off to the highest bidder regardless of loyalties."

"I am satisfied that in some cases ----at least -- minors have, by an indenture, been remanded back to a system of slavery no more humane, or just than the old system," the investigator said in his report. It was also learned that Mayo had bound at least two minors to himself and rented one of them to work for another party. Upon Ware's recommendation, Mayo was relieved of his office in Owensboro and replaced by Union Army Capt. A.W. Lawwill, a Kentuckian. (In an encouraging addition to his report Merrill complimented Daviess County, "In no place that I have visited in this state, have I found so many men of standing and position, who were as friendly to the Bureau, who seemed to wish it sustained, and its affairs properly and honestly administered as in Owensboro.")

Several anonymous residents wrote Gen. John Ely, superintendent of the Freedmen Bureau in Louisville, asking that a detective investigate the hanging of Conyer. It was Lawwill who reviewed the facts in the hanging and took five depositions. They would not identify themselves because they were afraid of retaliation. McDaniel and Norris were the only two men identified by Mayo. The others were ex-Confederate guerrillas who had the support of Confederate sympathizers. The was an example of the corruption and bad management found in the operation of Freeman Bureau offices in too many cases throughout Kentucky.

On Aug. 6, Pettit, recently elected secretary of the Daviess County Democratic Party, was jubilant about the results and the atmosphere of the election. As expected, the Democrats ruled the day and there were no Union Army soldiers present at the polls. "Monday last was one of those good old fashioned *'lection* days which the freemen of this country were wont to regard as a sort of political jollification, uninterrupted by the presence of bayonets or the exercise of a vile military censorship over their prerogatives as a sovereign people," the *Monitor* reported. "Ballots, not bullets, are legitimate weapons upon such occasions, and right manfully were they wielded against certain aspirants. Every man that was entitled to vote had the privilege of exercising his constitutional right, and the largest vote was polled in this county that has ever been cast before.

The paper noted that "ginger cakes and lemonade were in profusion and the absence of fisticuffs, drunkenness was a pleasing feature of the day ---not an arrest was made nor did a disturbance create of any kind. However, Pettit admitted that maybe "one or two pugilistic encounters would have relieved the monotony of the day." *Monitor, Wednesday, Aug. 8, 1866*

The new conservative Democrats effectively completed the political takeover of Daviess County as George W. Triplett won the county judgeship, defeating the county's most prominent Unionist John McFarland by a margin of 1,444-610 votes. *Ibid*

As county judge, Triplett, a former Confederate staff officer and member of the Confederate Congress, took control of the county's legal system, and the attacks on Union men that began before the election increased afterward when Democrat lawmen made no effort to arrest offenders and punish them.

According to Crane, McFarland and two other former Unionists wrote to Gen. Jefferson C. Davis, assistant commissioner for Freedmen's Bureau in Kentucky, complaining about the mistreatment of Union veterans. "McFarland pointed to Triplett's election as an important event in the perpetuation of violence on Union men, labeling the other men as 'returned guerrillas,'" Crane wrote. Federal troops were needed in Owensboro, one of the letter writers, Jesse Moore, said, adding: "The rebels are bold, defiant and unscrupulous in their demeritions of all men, who once wore blue or sustained the Union cause, they without provocation shot down men; and boast of it... Some eight or ten men have been murdered around us in the last few months.....shooting (Union men) is of common occurrence, threats are daily made. *Ibid, P. 21*

The white on white violence continued in the period after the election. Numerous white men who had served in the United States Army were threatened and told to get out of the county. Motives were both political and personal.

Some of the attacks were payback for disputes dating back to the war. Amos Metcalfe, a staunch Unionist, member of the Home Guard and Enrollment Officer for the federal government during the war, feuded with a band of former guerrillas. In August 1865, Walter McDaniel, Dr. George Davidson and the Carlisle brothers, all guerrillas, kidnapped Lt. John Hampton of the 35th Kentucky Infantry, U.S. Army, took him to Indiana and killed him. The execution of Hampton was in retaliation for Metcalfe killing John Chandler, a member of their band earlier in 1865 when Chandler was a member of the Home Guard. The men claimed to have ordered the killing of one of the Carlisle brothers. The Monitor reported that a group of men went to Hampton's house in Owensboro and abducted him as his wife watched. *P. 22, Crane*

After the 1866 August elections, McDaniel (who played a chief role in lynching Tom Conyer) convinced a sympathetic fellow deputy sheriff, Thomas Greenwell to arrest Metcalfe for killing Hampton. Instead Greenwell, shot Metcalfe three times, leaving him for dead. Metcalfe survived the shooting and gave deposition to Lawwill, who demanded that local lawmen be investigated. But he was ignored.

Lawwill reported in October 1866 that "low class white men" were responsible for perpetrating violence against Union Army veterans of both races. "There is a deep seated and bitter feeling existing among some, against the freed people," Lawwill said. "These, however, are not the influential and respected citizens but men who are returned guerrillas and have no respect for themselves or anyone else. These men are countenanced by some of the better portion of the community because they were rebels during the late war, this makes them bold and makes them a terror to the loyal portion of the community." Crane, P. 22-23

At that point, as the Freedmen's Bureau got more involved in Kentucky, the Federal government intervened against the growing violence toward former slaves. "Kentuckians viewed this development as an unjust intrusion of federal power into local affairs and often responded with greater levels of violence toward freed people," Crane writes. "For the former slaves, however, the Bureau served as a desperately needed ally in providing food, resources to start schools, legal representation and adjudication of labor contracts. It was successful in those

efforts. Unfortunately the Bureau could do nothing to improve the free people's political powerlessness within Kentucky." *P. 21 Crane*.

In the national elections in the fall of 1866, the Republicans were victorious by an overwhelming majority, winning enough seats to override any veto by President Johnson. Only the border-states of Delaware, Maryland and Kentucky voted for Democrats.

The Radicals now prevailed over Johnson's interpretation of Lincoln's policies for the Reconstruction. The buzzards were circling. The Radicals took control of Reconstruction policy and brought the once proud and arrogant South to its knees, removing former Confederates from power in their statehouses, and enfranchising the freedmen. Republicans used the Union Army and the Freedmen's Bureau to set up a free labor economy throughout the South. Thousands of Northern politicians and businessmen seized the opportunity, and descended upon the South to profit on Confederacy's defeat, revamp the Southern economy and rebuild the region's railroad system that was destroyed in the war.

Writing of the effects of Reconstruction in the old Confederacy, the Monitor acquiesced that the seceded states were compelled to remain and "gracefully accepted" the issue. "They are now in the Union as much as they ever were, so far as duty is concerned but are denied their rights under the Constitution which they before enjoyed, without law or reason. They were sovereign states when they attempted to secede. They are just as sovereign now and to assume the contrary as Congress does, is to yield the right of secession and its only want of success the power to maintain secession.

"If the war was not to prevent disunion then it was simply mercenary and wicked. If it was to preserve the union, that has been accomplished and there is no power in Congress to alter the position those states occupied before the war. That is the position of the President; the opinion of the Radicals is directly the opposite. They contend that the Southern States are not known to Congress; that they are out of the Union; that they are not entitled to representatives and they are opposed to admitting them into the Union and restoring the peace, harmony and prosperity of the country. The difference is vital – patriotic on the part of the president ---treasonable on the part of the Congress." *Monitor Oct 3, 1866*

Pettit, who was a devout supporter of President Johnson, continued to express his contempt for the Radicals Republicans who were overseeing "reconstruction" of the South. "Probably all history, if ransacked from the beginning to the end, can furnish no parallel to the utter ignorance and incompetence of the ruling Radicals of our country, to deal with the subjects out of which they expect to make the most for their party and their permanence of the Negro, they appear to be absolutely ignorant. Of his capacities and power to sustain himself among white men, (Negroes) know just nothing at all. And while they, poor simple souls, are anxiously and ardently, expecting to make their political fortunes out of him, he is tearing away the very foundations from beneath their feet.

"How thoroughly and how stupidly ignorant must those men be, not to see and to know, that no scheme could be more unpopular than that which places the Negro side by side with the white man at the polls and in the markets of labor. It insults the instincts of his race and takes the bread from his children's mouths. The wild cattle of radicalism may bellow out their wrath as they may please at this mountain in their path, but the laboring men of the North will laugh at their political calamities and rejoice at the swiftness and violence of their overthrow. No use could be made of the Negro more certain to ruin the radical cause, than to attempt to force him into a position of perpetual conflict with the white man as well as into an assumption of equality

nowhere acknowledged. The Radicals will find out after a while, that the Negro is destined to play a part so utterly repugnant to all their expectations, that they will be not a little touchy and cautious how they burn their fingers with him." *Monitor*, Oct. 30, 1866

In May 1867, the Confederate Democrats still dominated politics in Kentucky and the *Monitor* blatantly warned black men and women to stay "in their place." In a short article, the newspaper told the freedmen what they could expect,. "A colored friend of Thaddeus Stevens (the leader of the Radical Republicans in Congress) was severely cut by a (white) gentleman of this town on Sunday last, for insolent demonstrations. While we award credit to the blacks generally for their good behavior and deportment, we regret that one should so far forget himself as not to be mindful of his proper status, or to imagine that Kentucky is Africanized, and we hope for the future we will have no fault to record against anyone of their race," the *Monitor* commented. *Monitor*, May 22, 1867

Other similar threats of violence occurred in the postwar years allegedly involving Negroes who were being accused of insolence toward whites. In those incidents a white man killed or wounded the "transgressing" Negro. If Negroes, even with the help of the Bureau, were so bold as to build schools to educate their children, they could expect to have them burned down.

Terrorists groups in Daviess County, with such names as Regulators, the White Horse Company and the Ku Klux Klan, were determined to force Negro tenant farmers and freemen laborers out of the county. "The probable instigators of this post-1866 economic violence were the poorer whites in the community who did not want to compete with free black labor or who felt that if freed people were not enslaved they should not stay in the area as potential social equals," wrote Crane. *Crane P. 25.*

As early as December 1866, when local white landowners were finalizing their next year's crop agreements for renting property to black farmers, warning notices were posted, targeting white landowners who hired black workers or rented farms to free people, Crane wrote. If those white landowners allowed black farmers to house their tobacco in their barns, those structures would be burned. The notices were distributed to most every Unionist and many rebels, targeting all white locals who rented to free Negro men. *P. 25, Crane*

A response to the burnings and the unsigned, anonymous notices appeared in the *Owensboro Monitor* on March 6, 1867, sent by a white man who had rented a recently burned house. Pettit did not reveal the actual identity of the letter writer to protect him from retaliation.

"Some of us have had written notice served upon us through the post office to send away our hired Negroes and if this is not done, vengeance is to be executed upon us," the white man wrote, in a letter in which he issued a warning of his own. "1st, if a Negro house is burnt, or a Negro molested, or any place of ours, by any lawless and malicious man, or band of men, we are determined that such parties shall be brought to justice. There is still law in Daviess County, and there is still a penitentiary in Frankfort, and detectives shall be neither few nor fearful.

"2nd, the black people of this community are the weaker portion of our population. They are our laborers, and we, their employers. They look to us for employment and protection, and they shall not be disappointed, and we here say to these lawless house-burners, (if any of them can read) that they have put themselves in position of extreme peril: First, as they stand in the presence of the law of the land, and, second, that in their malicious attempt to drive off others, they themselves may be compelled to fly." The writer signed the letter as Johnny Roach, captain of the Anti-House Burners. *Monitor*, March 6, 1867

Editor Pettit agreed that every good resident of Daviess County should heed Roach's warning. "It's a matter of concern to each man who wants law and order in this county," Pettit

wrote. "It comes from no sympathizer with abolition but from law-abiding men. We are loathe to believe there is anyone in our midst who desires to see our city filled with soldiers and our people harassed by the military. If there are such, we can candidly tell them that they are pursuing the precise course to invite them here...This thing of intimidating citizens who have blacks on their places won't pay either, and we advise these anonymous 'ink fingers' that the majority of our order-loving and law observers are too great to be scared or intimidated by a few reckless and indiscreet persons." *Ibid, March 6, 1867*

In an Oct. 23, 1867, editorial, Pettit's paper voiced its disgust with Negroes testifying for the first time in Kentucky's courts. "We were reprehensive that our temples of justice would be defiled by the threat of Negro witnesses -- that first step toward the jury box and the white man's parlor. We had begun to despair of the purity of the witness stand, the integrity of our prospective law makers and the impotency of the protest of the Democratic voters of our state against any affiliation in degree or character with the machination of abolitionism and its indecencies."

Pettit never gave an inch in his criticism of the Federal government and the Bureau. Why not something do for the white soldiers who at least fought for the Union, the Monitor asked? "Reconstruct the freeborn white intelligent masses of Kentucky, whose sons have spilled their blood upon every battle field that could add renown to the country; whose statesmen have adorned and given character to its national assemblages, and have impressed their genius upon the history of almost every state ---excelling alike in the forum and in the field --- the state to be reconstructed by a party of political and moral scavengers, that they in common with the rabble black and white shall riot alike undisturbed and without measure in our borders --- a party whose statesmanship is outlawry, whose charities are crimes, and whose principles are plunder is as absurd as to try to add luster to the great orb of light." *Monitor, Oct. 23, 1867*

Pettit continued as editor of the Monitor until he sold it in 1874. He was able to score at least one major victory. The Freedmen's Bureau closed in Owensboro in June 1868. By Jan. 1, 1869, all offices in Kentucky closed except the one in Louisville. For all its achievements for black Americans, the Freedmen's Bureau compiled a record marred by corruption, bad management and poor judgment in the Commonwealth. The Bureau was gradually curtailed throughout the South by 1870. The last office was shut down in 1872.

Pettit continued as a leader in local and state Democrat politics, worked to bring new industry to Daviess County, and cleared large tracts of land south of the Owensboro city limits, developing several very productive farms in a community of Daviess County that would bear his name. He was outspoken with a great ego and great political ambition...he was a constitutional conservative in the model of Jefferson and Madison...Despite his feel for the pulse of the people he was not always popular with the press or his party and never achieved the political success he desired. Pettit was a man who raised issues but not votes. He seemed to always be barking at the establishment whether it was the Republican Party of the 1860s or the Democratic Party of the 1890s. He attracted controversy".

As a supporter of President Andrew Johnson, Pettit was appointed assessor of internal revenue for the second congressional district. He was assistant reading clerk of the Kentucky House in 1868 and was private secretary to Gov. James McCreery, after his term with the revenue service. He resigned that position except appointment as reading clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, serving 10 years. He was an "affable little man with the big voice" which could be heard through the chamber.

Pettit was considered the real power behind the official Kentucky delegation in Washington. He ran for Congress in 1882 but lost to J.B. Clary of Henderson in a close election. He won by a

large majority when he ran in 1890 as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He was known as hard working man and a man of strong convictions. Called the “Little Giant from Owensboro,” he pushed for progressive reforms. He ran for Congress again in 1892 and lost.

He ran for governor on the People Party ticket in 1895, causing a split in the Democratic ranks which permitted William Bradley, a Republican, to win. The Louisville *Courier-Journal* called him “the acknowledged leader of the reform movement in Kentucky.” *Aloma Dew, Messenger-Inquirer June 8, 1999*

On the state level, Reconstruction in Kentucky was the most lawless period in the history of Kentucky since the war ended, and it continued through the rest of the century. For a while, in some counties political corruption thrived and the Kentucky judicial system failed to enforce the criminal law on the books. People wanted government in the state to do what government is supposed to do ---- legislate, protect and improve the lives of its cities. Perhaps build new schools, highways and railroads, arrest and punish the outlaw leftovers from the war.

“Long before the struggle was over, coming to feel the purposes and praises of the war were being perverted, Kentucky assumed a highly critical attitude toward the Federal authorities which remained to color her views when peace came,” Coulter wrote. “She now showed herself more Southern in her habits of thought and sympathies than perhaps than any other part of the former Confederacy itself. She posed as a champion of the states beset by the carpetbagger and carried her proscription of Union men in her own borders so far as to almost bring down reconstruction on her own head. It was often remarked that she waited until after the war was over to secede from the Union.” *Coulter, P. 439.*

Kentucky left a legacy which has been a curse on the state and a weakened respect for state authority, Coulter wrote in 1926. The lawlessness tarnished Kentucky’s reputation for decades to come in the 20th century.

Politicians fought gun battles in the streets. Kentucky became the only state in the Union to have a governor assassinated. An era of even deeper ignorance and racial discrimination began in the South. Negroes in Kentucky lost all the rights they had also gained in the 14th and 15th Amendments during Reconstruction. White supremacy reigned for another 100 years. Lynchings were still the best reminded Negroes of their place in society.

In 1884 the Daviess County jail was located on the southeast corner of St. Ann and Third streets, very close to the court house. It was a large two story residential section which Lucas shared with his wife and six children. Lucas, who had been elected to the office in August 1882, was a native of Maryland, born in 1834 in St Mary’s County. He was a former Confederate soldier, had served with a Gregg’s First South Carolina Regiment at the bombardment for Fort Sumter. He was a painter by trade, a poor man but hardworking man, the Messenger later reported, He and his wife Mildred had six children, in 18 year old Tommy. They all lived in the jail residence.

All that Lucas knew of May was that he had been arrested on July 4. Dick was 23 years old and had lived on with Sod Kelly for seven years, working as a farm hand. He was regarded as faithful and reliable before his alleged crime with Kelly’s daughter. Never at any times did he deny the accusation against him.

He said he had been on intimate terms with the young woman for two years. He admitted repeated making “indecent proposals” to her, to which she had never given her consent but had never repulsed him. In his first appearance, he insisted he never raped or assaulted her. He read

his Bible and prayed continually. He told Jailer William Lucas he had made his peace with God and told the jailer that if a mob came, he wanted to be buried in a new suit of clothes that were at Kelly's house four miles from Owensboro.

The alleged offense was committed on July 4 and he was arrested the following Monday. Few people knew about it. The Negro was charged with "ravishing" a white woman. Rumors took over and there were several reports of a mob being formed, one held at Tollgate and the other at Murray's Woods. Both those meetings broke up 3:30 a.m. The next day Lucas, knowing he was in trouble from a big mob told County Judge John Atchison that there no way he and his son Tommy could prevent him from defending the jail and preventing May from being abducted without Lucas, without reinforcements. The county judge John Atchison appointed Charles Haney, a bailiff, and asked them to increase number of men guarding the jail. Nothing happened; the threats to attack the jail seemed to be false. The county judge ordered Haney to dismiss the special security detail as talk of a mob subsided for now.

After midnight, (1:30 a.m. exactly, group of riders first estimate to be as many as 50 appeared in downtown, the Messenger reported, Lucas was surprised by their number. They came out of nowhere, it seemed. The biggest group rode west down Fourth street, turned right at Daviess and then approached the Courthouse riding down Third Street. One group appeared at Second Street, another They has set up a perimeter on the jailhouse. The leader of the mob rode a white horse. They wore black masks. He and seven or eight men showed themselves from the opera house. Lucas stood at the entrance of the jail and shouted "halt" twice.

"Who are you?" the leader said. Some pistol shots were fired in the air, perhaps to intimidate the jailer. "I am Lucas, the jailer." As a bigger group of men advanced, Lucas ran around the house and up the stairway to the residence. As he reached the top, he shouted to them. Don't come in that gate. I will shoot the first man who does. Several shots were fired probably trying to intimate the mob. He replied "I'll be god-damn if I give up the jail. I swear to god that I will never give him up to you.

"Give him up" the leader said again as the others were trying to batter the front door, the newspaper reported. Some in the mob tried to break in the front door of the residence and smashed one of the parlor windows, Tommy fired several shots of one of the upstairs front windows, possibly wounding two. Jailer Lucas fired at least six shots but dropped to the floor after being shot in the right breast. Seeing Lucas was wounded Mrs. Lucas and Tommy dragged the jailer to a bed in the living room of the residence. They sent for a doctor and Mrs. Lucas found the keys. All to protect May ended when Lucas was shot. By that time the mob had been using a sledge hammer and broke the lock, and started toward the cellblock. Once they found May and pulled him out of his cell, May begged for time to pray as they led him down the stairway. A reporter for Messenger who witnessed the action, said May's "arms were bound firmly behind him but his feet were not tied. The rope about the size of a plow line, was put around his neck the end was thrown over a limb and while some held him up, it was secured and then he was allowed to drop the men jerking him down. His heels crack together convulsively and then all e was over. Instantly the men left, mounted their horses and all rode quietly out of the city."

The Messenger continued, "Then spectators who had previously not been allowed to draw near, rushed into the courthouse yard and viewed in the dim light from Fisher's saloon the body of the Negro hanging to a tree with his feet within a foot of the ground. A ghastly sight May's corpse hung there until 6:30, his features were contorted with pain and the tongue hung out of his mouth."

In the Lucas residence a doctor had declared his wound mortal. The jailer was given opiates to ease the pain. A priest had given Lucas the last rites, he died at 6:30 a.m. Few people in town claimed they knew about the lynching until the sun rose. Not more than 30 people witnessed the work of the mob, the Messenger reported. Less than hundred had visited the scene before dawn. None had volunteered to help Lucas..

The following day Negroes in town were very much excited, they stood in groups conversing all day, maybe with thoughts of hanging Kelly and his daughter. Uncharacteristically that same night in the Negro communities of Snow Hill and Sisters Hill there was excitement and fear by white people who feared the black would seek vengeance for murder of May. Many blamed Judge Atchison who had pulled the added security from the jail, after talking to prominent citizens who thought the mob threat.

'Black men blamed Atchison for the move. There was also talk that Negroes were intending to retaliate on Kelly believing he incited the mob. However, Kelly had moved his family to a safer place in Yelvington. An extraordinary amount of ammunition was sold to Negroes of the hours after the lynching, hardware dealers told a newspaper reporter wrote

There was great indignation at the brutal work of the mob. According to the Messenger, the murder of the white jailer was condemned on every hand. Special police were patrolled the city after the lynching

On July 22 Daviess Circuit Court Judge Lucius Little seemed to be the only man outraged by May's death. He called a 16 man grand jury to investigate the two murders and in the process gave them a firm lecture on the constitutional rights of Americans that now applied to both whites and now all Negroes. . "The law guarantees to the right of a trial to be every prisoner. He should be confronted by witness, to be represented by defense counsel. The Constitution grants the Negroes the same civil rights in a court room as whites.

"He was a denied all these things, and he was not even allowed time for a saying a prayer before his death. "I say to you that each and every person that joined that bloody work who came to town with the mob, understanding its purpose, aiding and encouraging it by their presence or otherwise, are guilty of murder and this grand jury should indict you for that offense. If there be a man on this grand jury who sympathizes with that mob, or any of those acts, he should say so and I will discharge him. None of you speak I felt I did not misjudge in believing you incapable of entertaining sentiments at a war with Christian civilization,

A week or so since a Negro was committed to jail charged with assault with intent to ravish.

"Whether guilty as charged he remained to be tried. But is guilty his offense was not a felony," No one ever gave any information to Judge Little that might led to charging anyone who participated in the crime.

The judge closed by saying the action by the mob disgraced "our city and county and dishonored the state." No one came forward with more information about the lynching. There was never any indictment handed down.

Seemingly always on the wrong side of history, Kentucky could not discard the past. Democrats became so immersed in internal party squabbling and rivalries that they were slow to develop their rich natural resources and convert them into an economy that would benefit every worker in the state. They were backward in their economic and political thought. With little political vision or education, Kentucky remained in the top 10 of perennial poor states in the Union. Electing a

black governor and U.S. Senator was unthinkable. *Courier-Journal, Jan. 17, 1871 and P. 363, Coulter.*

In the 50 years after the war, whites began romanticizing the lost cause of the Old Confederacy. In Owensboro a monument paying tribute to the Confederate soldier was erected on the southwest corner of the courthouse square. The county never honored its US white soldiers with the same reverence of the rebels who called Daviess County home.

The Old Confederacy had lost the Civil War but won “the peace.” Segregation continued as a way of life, but finally that would change. In the 20th century, after the federal civil rights bill became law on July 2, 1964, Kentucky Gov. Edward Breathitt of Hopkinsville set July 20 as the date for a pre-legislative conference to determine whether he would call a special General Assembly session to pass a state civil rights bill.

Kentucky legislators resisted. Senator Casper “Cap” Gardner, D-Owensboro, noted that a bill proposed by Breathitt at the legislative session earlier in 1964 had died, saying it was unlikely that the legislature would pass anything new addressing civil rights.

Gardner predicted the legislature would reject a special session if the balloting were secret. “I think that any proposed legislation should pertain only to public accommodations... I am not convinced that the people of Kentucky are for integration, certainly not on the scale approved by the federal government (in the recent civil rights law.)” Gardner said he would vote to correct injustices, but not to “create more discord than now exists.” *AP, July 9, 1964*

Before that conference, Breathitt said he knew that many Kentuckians did not agree with the federal law but he urged “peaceful compliance, compassion and respect for the law. Any Kentuckian who does less ---any Kentuckian who seeks to inflame rather than becalm the issue not only--- does a disservice to his own cause --- whatever his belief may be--- he does a disservice to himself and the state in which he lives --- the state he loves.” *AP, July 20, 1964*

Breathitt said Kentucky needed a state law so that the federal courts would not step in when discrimination occurs in Kentucky. The federal law permitted states with civil rights laws to solve their own discrimination problems. Breathitt said he was encouraged that there was no racist speech delivered at the conference “an indication of the fact that Kentuckians are not opposed to civil rights.” Legislators were opposed.

The governor said he did not intend to call a special legislative session on civil rights until after the fall election – and maybe not then. If Kentucky experienced any civil rights problems in the meantime, he said he would ask the federal government to use the community relations service created in the federal law to help solve it. *Ibid, AP July 20, 1964*

Three federal judges ruled on July 22 that the new Civil Rights Act was constitutional under the powers of Congress to regulate commerce, and the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the lower court’s ruling on Dec. 14, 1964.

Gov. Breathitt would succeed in 1966, when the Legislature easily passed the Kentucky Civil Rights Act, opening all public accommodations to people of every race and prohibiting racial discrimination in employment by firms that employed eight or more people.

The act applied to many kinds of businesses not covered by the federal statute, and approximately 90 percent of the businesses in Kentucky were affected, compared to only 60 percent that were covered by the federal law.

Kentucky’s civil rights law was the first of its kind passed in a Southern state. While few legislators knew the historic precedence they would be forming, they took action on a resolution they realized needed their immediate attention. Kentucky gained redemption as the General Assembly corrected a mistake they had neglected and long forgotten. And in 1976, the Kentucky

Legislature finally ratified the Thirteenth Amendment outlawing slavery. White men's attitudes did not change overnight, but Jim Crow was finally dead, and black Kentuckians were legally "free at last."

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