

Lynching of Raymond Bushrod

By Jerry Long
c.1924



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Lynching: Hawesville was scene of angry
mob's wrath on a Sunday in 1897

The following account of the lynching of 20-year-old Raymond Bushrod, is reproduced as it appeared in an October, 1897, issue of the Hancock Clarion. The editor, Clarence Sterett, wrote in explicit detail of events leading to the hanging of the young black man at the hands of an enraged mob.



The rules which govern news reporting are quite different today. Although Sterett wrote in a concise, hard-hitting style, he spiced the story with his own conclusions that could in no way be verified. On the other hand, there seems to be words that he could not put in print, but only vaguely refer to. The crime of which Bushrod was accused, and for which he was hanged, was forcible rape, perpetrated against a 14-year-old white girl. Nowhere in the story does Sterett use that word. He also left his readers the option of filling in the blank spaces when he wrote the words h--- and "hand the s-- o- a b---" in his descriptive prose.

Today's media, in most cases, would have no problem with the words; but the media is now forbidden by law to use the name of the victims, a juvenile, in print. No news service would be allowed to follow Sterett's practice of concluding what was in the criminal's mind at the time the offense was committed. Mr. Sterett presumed to know what Bushrod was thinking... and printed it as fact. All in all, his report is coherent and well done, without a hint of fear that he might be slapped with a lawsuit. Editors of that time, men such as Clarence Sterett and Mark Twain, pushed their liberties with the printed word to the hilt. They frequently had to defend themselves with their fists... seldom in a court of law. It is a pleasure for the Clarion to unearth the genuine writings of its founding editor, who expressed himself in so free a manner before the freedom of the press began to experience a partial loss of that freedom.

STRETCHED

Was Raymond Bushrod's Neck, for a Brutal Assault on Little Maggie Roberts.

In the broad, open glare of a Sunday sun, in the presence of half-a-thousand enraged men and excited women, in a stone's throw of four places of divine worship, and under the very drippings of the Temple of Justice; these are the conditions surrounding Raymond Bushrod when he went to eternity. Not a mask, or a pistol shot, or a drunken man!

Bushrod was a colored man, weighed about 150, age 20 and hailed from Rockport, Ind. Several months ago he first appears upon this scene as partaking of the kindness of Willis Clark a prominent young farmer in the upper part of the county. Later on for his kindness he steals Clark's gold watch. Readers of the Clarion will remember this. After serving a jail sentence here of 156 days he was released about three weeks ago.

On Saturday afternoon he was in town drunk. About 4 o'clock he started West on the "Texas" railroad walking. Near Petri three miles below town he encountered poor, little defenseless Maggie Roberts, 14 years old and a daughter of Ben H. Roberts, a highly respected farmer of that section. She was on an errand to the Petri store. The brute in Bushrod was dominant. Twice before—once an attempt on a white girl and another on his 60-year-old aunt, both in Indiana—had he looked in the yawning mouth of h--l and twice he had escaped severe punishment. Another attempt, he thinks, will result in lice.

So after a desperate chase and a furious struggle this king of all demons steals the life happiness of one family to assuage a brutal instinct. More dead than alive, buffeted by rude and drunken hands and hammered into insensibility with an iron coupling pin this deserted and unfortunate little maid was left on the railroad grade to die.

Partially recovering she dragged herself to the neighborhood store where the disclosure was made. Pursuing parties were formed and her father who was breaking ground on the Mayfield place a mile away was informed. News of the outrage reached town and spread like wild-fire through the country and into Lewisport. Both towns were deserted and for a scope of ten miles the

roads and paths were thick with search parties. Every skiff for 20 miles was guarded and going to Ayres' landing. Bushrod failed to get across. Striking back to the railroad he got as far as Falcon, the mining town four miles below the scene of the crime. Here he was detected in hiding under the railway platform about midnight by the Messrs. Ford and Long. They brought him out and took him before the girl. She, with others, identified him and it was with much effort that Roberts was prevented from shooting him in the house. A colored neighbor wanted him hung in front of his house. The four gentlemen took a vote whether they should hang him or not. Three favored and one objected, so they started on their journey to Hawesville to surrender him to the authorities. All along the road from Falcon to Hawesville mad crowds of men were overtaken, met and passed, but Bushrod was required to lay flat in the wagon bed in dark and thus he safely ran the course.

When they arrived in town what few people were left had retired and he was placed in jail. Later, through fear of a mob, he was removed to the cemetery on the hill and heavily guarded until about daylight, when he was again locked up. Very few people knew at daylight that he had been caught.

Sunday was a long day. There was no attempt to conceal the mob talk. In fact it grew so strong that it forced the officials to think of moving him, which as later shown, would have meant instant death at any time. Judge Adair in the afternoon advised with Judge Owens in Louisville. He told him to either run him off to Louisville or Owensboro, or put a strong guard around the jail. The former could not be done for fear of a mob and for the latter it is not believed that enough guards could have been found who would serve.

It was generally understood at Cannelton, Lewisport and all throughout the county that the hanging would be pulled off very soon after dark, but after dinner the town began to fill up. They came on horses, afoot, in wagons, on steamboats, and trains. The mad men were not yet satisfied that an attempt would not be made to get him on the 4:40 east-bound train. Another rumor that set them ablaze was to the effect that Company H of the State militia at Owensboro would arrive on that train for protection. at 4:40 o'clock a mob of 50 to 100 led by a tramp from Indiana organized to meet the exigencies of the militia. They couldn't wait. Filing into the basement of the jail the leader approached Sheriff Fuqua and said, "my name is Scheffer, and we want that negro." He was refused. Securing a battery, they then broke the door. A demand was made on Jailer Brown for the key to the cell wherein Bushrod lay cowering like a cur. Brown refused to give up the key and was grabbed from behind while another took it from his pocket. After some little difficulty in unlocking the cell door they got in.

Bushrod got behind the door and hid himself and at this opportune time a yell went up outside that he had escaped. It was only a little ruse fixed up by one of the officers. An innocent negro was turned loose, who ran down Main Street with hundreds of men in hot pursuit. The train had now arrived and was pulling out of town. With the added expectation of the militia the crowd was one wild demon past control. One of two of the original mob stayed in or about the jail and refused to be led off in this chase. At this time the Sheriff tried to act. Bushrod was brought out with the hope that he could rush him over the hills and out of town on horse-back, but these remaining two stopped him in the ditch in front of the jail. The sheriff refused to surrender to so few, but they gained their point by a delay until the frenzied mob had returned from the fruitless chase. They soon crowded about. The Sheriff was powerless and members of the mob drew pistols. He yielded through force.

Half pulling and carrying the frightened wretch they brought him across the sidewalk and started down the street. Several times he was struck at, and before halting in front of the big poplar

tree overhanging the sidewalk half way between the gate and corner someone hit him with a brick retained in the hand.

The climax is now to be reached. Halting a few minutes bedlam reigned. He was asked for confession and prayer. His confession was in substance; "I am guilty, I have done this before, but am sorry." At this juncture he muttered an incoherent prayer and all witnesses agreed that he was frightened utterly to death at this period. Not being satisfied with his prayer a big man in the mob fell on his knees and uttered a fervent appeal for his soul. Being a man unused to such it was considered one of the peculiarities of that occasion. While asking them for prayer other were crying, "hang the-----." In proof that death had come through fright Bushrod lay helpless on the sidewalk while hands and legs were pinned. A new plow line being ready the rope was adjusted and put over a convenient limb. The other end was dangled down until caught by half-dozen strong men when Raymond Bushrod was swung into eternity. As he went up cheers upon cheers were given and the hillside was dotted with an hundred women who waved their handkerchiefs in wild glee. A slight drawing up of the legs was the only evidence of pain. The leader of the mob stepped to one side, doffed his hat and said: "This is the protection we offer our wives and daughters. Good Bye. Nobody knows where Hobo goes except God." With this he and the crowd slowly dispersed and Coroner Mitchell viewing the body had it cut down in about 40 minutes. A jury of six was summoned and after hearing some testimony their verdict was that Raymond Bushrod came to his death at the hands of unknown parties. One jurymen refused to sign the verdict because sufficient effort had not been made to ascertain names of the mob. The remains were taken to Henry's undertaking establishment and the next evening, in accordance with a state law where the relatives refuse to accept the remains were shipped to the Louisville medical society.

Lynchpins.

The attention of the mob was called to a murmuring negro in the crowd and the next morning his clothes were expressed to him in Missouri.

The CLARION has saved clippings from such papers as come to its table and pasted on end. The story of lynching now measures more than 50 feet.

Gov. Bradley has offered \$500 reward for the arrest and conviction of each or any of the Hawesville mob. The word 'conviction' will keep everybody poor.

Many prominent gentlemen from a distance paid our city a pleasant social call Sunday evening but for lack of space our personal column is entirely omitted.

Miss Roberts was getting along very well yesterday and will recover. The coupling pin with which Bushrod assaulted her has been found sticking in the ground as if thrown at her when he went to leave.

The Messenger had an extra on the street here at daylight Monday with a full account. Blake Fuqua came up later with several hundred gratuitous copies. The Cincinnati Tribune was giving away papers off the street at 10:10 Monday with a full account.

Ten men came up from Grandview on the train and ran to see the event. After night one was heard to say, "Aint this a hot town?" She's alright. They just held that thing until we got here. This crowd pulled about all the limbs off and took it back as souvenirs.

Bushrod served three years in a reform school for a similar attempt on a white girl named Wires in Spencer County. He enticed his aunt, "Aunt Vina," away in a buggy under the pretence that there was sickness at the home of her son three miles away. He was a hardened criminal.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 27 September 1897, p.1:

IN DAYLIGHT.
Raymond Bushrod Taken
From the Sheriff at
Hawesville.
Five Hundred Men Were in the
Gang That Swung the
Brute Skyward.
A Woman Urged and Directed the Mob
and Screamed With Delight at
Its Work.
AN AWFUL CRIME DULY AVENGED

Hawesville, Ky., Sept. 27. – Raymond Bushrod, the negro rapist, paid the penalty of his awful crime Sunday afternoon at 4:55 o'clock, in the presence of 500 men, women and children. Unmasked, and without any attempt to conceal their identity, the members of the mob, infuriated and almost crazed by excitement, gratified their thirst for vengeance. It was an awful sight, sickening and pitiful.

It was almost a miracle that the negro escaped lynching Saturday night after he was caught, and he certainly would have been had he fallen into the hands of any of the searching parties. He was apprehended by a small party of country boys, who brought him to town and delivered him to the officers. It was not generally known until dawn that the negro was in duress, and from that early hour men commenced to congregate about the jail. By 10 o'clock the town seemed full of people, and the excitement was intense and mob talk open. All day the hills and roads leading out of town were guarded by countrymen on horseback, which was unnecessary, as the jail was surrounded, and it would have been impossible for the officers to have escaped with the prisoner.

The crowd grew larger and the excitement was more intense every hour. Judge Adair saw that the prisoner could not be taken to the train, and yet knew that no power could save him if he remained in the jail till night. He called up Judge Owen and asked his advice over the telephone. Judge Owen told him to get the prisoner off on the 5 o'clock train east bound, but if it was unwise to attempt such a thing, to guard the jail, which was all that could be done under the circumstances. About 4 o'clock it became known that an attempt would be made to slip the negro on the east bound 5 o'clock train, and the mob became very restless. Another rumor was started to the effect

that Company H. from Owensboro would be up on the train. The crowd at this time was concentrating about the jail. It seemed there was a lack of leadership. Suddenly a man stepped up to Sheriff Fuqua and said: "My name is Schaeffer, and we must have that negro now." At the same time the jailer was overpowered and the keys taken from him. It was all over. A start at any time was all that was necessary. Before the keys were taken from the jailer the doors had been broken open. At this moment some one cried that the negro had escaped from the back part of the jail.

Everybody started in pursuit. Even the men who had just broken the door of the jail open ran without entering to see if the negro was within.

The maddened crowd yelled and waved their pistols in the air and rushed as if impelled by some superhuman force in the direction the negro was supposed to have taken. Residences were searched and a score of men broke into the Presbyterian church looking for him. The negro all this time had never been out of jail. Deputy Sheriff Miles Fuqua at the critical moment while the crowd was away, rushed the negro out of jail. There was nobody around and he made for a horse that was hitched near by, but the negro from some cause did not want to go with the sheriff, who dragged him along. It looked like he would get away, but he was overtaken in a minute and the mob had him. The negro was in the centre of a crowd of 500 men all trying to get to him. It seem there was no concert of action in the mob. Everybody wanted to do it differently. It was impossible to tell from even a short distance who had possession of the negro. Finally the mob stopped under a tree in the court house square. No one had a rope. During the delay in sending for one the prisoner was given time to confess and pray, he admitted that he had raped Maggie Roberts and that he deserved death. The negro, as he dropped on his knees and crossed his hands and turned his face toward heaven and prayed, was the most pitiful sight imaginable. His body shook and he trembled as from palsy. His hands were tied, the rope was put around his neck and he was dangling in the air. Scores of women witnessed the hanging and a country woman with her riding whip in her hand urged the mob on and screamed with delight when the deed was done. The mob was orderly and dispersed immediately after the negro was swung up. In a short time Coroner A. G. Mitchell ordered the body cut down for the purpose of holding an inquest.

Coroner's Inquest.

The following men served on the jury at the inquest. Geo. W. Newman, W. L. Sterett, Jas. R. Rice, John R. Rice, John Parker, S. D. Baker and E. W. Smith. Only three or four witnesses were examined all of whom testified that they did not know who were in the mob. The following is the verdict of the jury:

"We of the jury find that the deceased, Raymond Bushrod, came to his death at the hands of a mob by being strangled, the members of which are unknown.

Geo. W. Newman, one of the jury men, refused to sign the verdict stating as his reason that sufficient effort had not been made to find out the names of persons who were in the mob and that it was in evidence that one Schaeffer was culpable. The Schaeffer referred to lives in Cannelton and is a machinist. Everybody seems to be in sympathy with the action of the mob, and it would be very difficult, if not impossible to convict any one for taking part in it.

The Louisville Medical society has telegraphed for the remains of Bushrod and his body will be sent to Louisville today.

County Attorney E. C. Vance informed your correspondent that he did not think any conviction could be had for complicity in the mob on account of public sentiment. He does not think any one can be found who will testify positively as to the guilt of any person. He will not request Judge Owen to convene the grand jury for the purpose of investigation.

A large crowd is in town today and the mob of yesterday is the sole topic of conversation. Your correspondent has been unable to find a single person who does not endorse the action of the mob. Scores of farmers say that their wives insisted on their coming to town yesterday, and it is a fact that the women were as much worked up and as vehement in their cries for vengeance as the men.

This is the third offense of rape for Bushrod. He served a term of several years in Indiana for raping his aunt, 65 years old.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 27 September 1897, p.1:



Lewis Bushrod Hanged for Raping Little Maggie Roberts
A Woman a Conspicuous Leader of the Infuriated Citizens.

Deed Done In Broad Open Daylight and in Presence of Six Hundred People.
Threat That Troops Would Be Ordered There Hastened the Action of the Lynchers.
SO BE IT EVER TO RAPISTS.

The brutal outrage upon the person of little Maggie Roberta has been avenged, and another black fiend, confessedly guilty, has learned that the penalty for rape is rope. There is no use to moralize over it – no use to call down maledictions upon the state or the officers. Right or wrong, as long as black brutes outrage white women, just that longwill citizens swing the brutes to a convenient limb.

Lewis Bushrod, the negro who raped Maggie Roberts, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Mr. Ben Roberts, of the Petrie station neighborhood, on the "Texas" railroad, about 5 o'clock Saturday afternoon, was taken from the Hawesville jail at 5:06 o'clock Sunday afternoon by a mob and hanged.

The hanging occurred three hours earlier than it was scheduled, as it was the intention of the mob to string the brute up at 8 o'clock Sunday night, but on the arrival of the 4:55 east-bound "Texas" train somebody circulated the report that Company H., of the Kentucky state guards, of this city, would soon be in Hawesville on a special train to guard the jail.

The mob, 600 strong, could be no longer restrained, and they made a rush for the jail. The excitement was wild, and Hawesville was in the greatest state of frenzy ever known to the citizens of that little city.

They attacked the jail with sledge hammers, and the doors were soon battered down, and the mob on the in-side.

The negro crouched under the bed in his cell, the only hiding place to be found, but the cell door was hammered down, the frightened negro dragged from under the bed, a rope thrown around his neck, and he was hurried out across the street to a tree. The rope was thrown over a limb, about fifteen feet from the ground, and about forty hands then gathered the rope drew the negro up.

The mob then dispersed, and within an hour the people who had participated in the mob had deserted the streets. They made no attempt to conceal their identity, as none of them wore masks. The mob, so a gentleman says, who witnessed the hanging, were infuriated, and desperation was plainly depicted on their countenances.

The employes of the through freight, which passes Petrie at 5:53 say that the men were going into Hawesville in groups of twenties and thirties, and had the lynching occurred as late as the hour arranged, 8 p. m., there would have been over 1,500 men in it.

It is said that a well-dressed woman was prominent in the front rank of the mob. She carried a vicious looking revolver, and said that she would like to shoot the life out of the scoundrel.

The officers undertook to spirit Bushrod out of town on the 9:05 west-bound train Saturday night, but were prevented by the mob, which had every avenue of escape from the town well guarded. The hanging would have occurred Saturday night but for the fact that there were hundreds of people who were out scouring the country searching for the negro and knew nothing of his arrest, and it was decided to postpone the lynching till Sunday night, in order that the mob might be made up of citizen's from all parts of the county, thereby indicating a general uprising on the part of the people in a demand for immediate vengeance on the head of the lustful brute.

Bushrod is a tall, smooth-faced mulatto and weighs about 150 pounds. Two weeks ago he was liberated from the Hancock county jail, where he had served a sentence of 130 days for stealing a watch.

Just before he was drawn up, Bushrod was asked if he was guilty, and he said that he was, and it was his third offense of the kind. He undertook to make a statement of his crime, but broke down, becoming unconscious.

The officers got up a ruse to deceive the mob by having a negro to run down the main street just as the 4:56 p. m. east-bound train pulled into Hawesville, with the intention of making the mob believe that Bushrod had escaped from jail. About 300 of the mob gave chase to the negro, but there were 300 or more who were on to the deception, and remained on guard around the jail. The officers saw how futile their attempt was to fool the mob and did not take their prisoner out of the jail. Soon the report concerning the militia was in circulation, and the mob made the rush on the jail. The officers refused to surrender Bushrod, but did not dare offer any resistance to the mob in their attempts to enter the jail.

It is the first lynching to occur in the history of Hancock county.

The body was allowed to hang until after dark, when it was cut down by the coroner, a jury empaneled and an inquest held. The jury returned a verdict, stating that the deceased came to his death by the hands of parties unknown to the jury.

Bushrod was captured Saturday night in about three hours after he committed his heinous crime, by four men who were on the hunt for him. They found him at Falcon, a station six miles west of Hawesville, showing that he had succeeded in getting nearly ten miles away from the scene of his crime without detection. He was hid under the platform of the Falcon depot, where he was found by his captors.

It was his intention to escape on the first west-bound freight. He was placed in a wagon by the four men who arrested him and taken to Petrie, where he was identified by his victim. His captors left with him and started for Hawesville, but after getting a mile or two from Petrie, decided

to return to Mr. Roberts' and put the girl to one more test. She again identified him, and he was taken to Hawesville and placed in jail. While being conveyed from Falcon to Petrie and from Petrie to Hawesville, quite a number of those who were looking for him were met and at one time a crowd of over fifty armed men passed the wagon, but the negro was lying down in the wagon, and in the darkness, was not discovered, the mob supposing the men in the wagon to be farmers returning from Owensboro.

Fearing that he would be lynched when the mob learned that he was in jail, the officers took Bushrod to a cemetery near town, where they kept him until just before daylight and returned him to jail.

Lover's Leap and other hills in the town were covered with women, who looked approvingly on. The mob was composed of men and women, both white and colored, and persons who witnessed the whole proceeding were unable, in the excitement, to tell who any of the participants were. The leader of the mob, a large six-footer, was a stranger, and immediately after the hanging he could nowhere be seen. He is said to be an Indiana man.

The news of the rape of Henry Richardson, a negro, on Lucy Smith, the colored girl in Owensboro, had reached Hawesville, and hundreds of the mob suggested that they come to Owensboro and lynch Richardson.

In his confession to the officers Saturday night, Bushrod says that the first rape he ever committed was at Ferdinand, Ind., several years ago, and the second one was at Rockport about two years ago. Both his Indiana victims were colored.

The mob, according to an eye witness, was very deliberate in its work. After getting the negro out of jail, it was discovered that there was no rope convenient. The negro was held while several persons went after the necessary article. He was asked if he had anything to say, and he spoke in clear, distinct voice:

"I am guilty. I am sorry. I hope I will die easy."

He then requested permission to pray, and mumbled something incoherent, which no one could understand.

The rope had by this time been secured, and Bushrod was lifted up on the court-house fence. The rope was tied around his neck and thrown over a limb. He was then drawn up and let down several times, though not enough to allow his feet to touch. Finally the end of the rope was tied to the fence and the negro was allowed to swing.

There was no evidence of a struggle except a slight contraction of the legs, and the face was not contorted.

What aroused the mob to a frenzy was the story that the Owensboro company of militia was coming on a special. It is said that if the boys had gone they would have fared harshly, for the mob intended to brook no interference.

One spectator said he felt sure there were five hundred pistols and guns displayed, but not a shot was fired, and, considering the size of the crowd, it was extraordinarily quiet.

So far as the opinion could be secured, the hanging was commended, and there was no voice raised in protest.

A former Hawesville citizen, who saw the mob, and who thought he knew every man in the county, said he would never think it strange again that onlookers could not swear to the identity of the participants. He said although it was broad daylight, and he had a post of advantage, he could not identify a single man whom he could swear took part.

Ben Roberts, the father of the victim, was present when the lynching took place, so far as known, taking no active part. He said the little girl was very seriously injured and that he had hardly a hope of her recovery.



Hawesville, Sept. 25. – Hawesville and vicinity are in a state of madness tonight, greater than ever known before, and the result of it will likely be the first lynching in the history of Hancock county before morning.

Maggie, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Mr. Ben Roberts, a farmer living near Petrie station, on the Texas railroad, about three miles from Hawesville, was assaulted and outraged by an unknown negro at about 5 o'clock this afternoon.

The young lady had been to Petrie's store to do some shopping and was on her way home afoot, when the negro attacked her. The brute struck , her on the head and knocked her down. He then accomplished his hellish designs.

Her screams were heard by Fred Petrie, John Beauchamp and Ed Muffit, who were some distance away. They ran to her assistance, but the fiend had outraged her and fled. The three men went in pursuit of the villian, and aroused the neighborhood. The news of the awful deed spread very rapidly, and every man and boy able to carry a gun joined in the hunt. The report soon reached this place and Hawesville was thrown in a perfect frenzy of excitement, and there was a general rush of maddened men, well armed, and with a desperate determination to avenge the horrible outrage by lynching the negro as soon as caught and identified, began to scour the country.

It is thought that the negro is in hiding in the woods on the Hughes farm, and the people have the forest surrounded, while a posse is making a thorough search of every nook and corner of the woods.

Sheriff Fuqua and Marshal Thomas both left here with posse's to join in the search.

The Messenger correspondent inter viewed Mr. Roberts, father of the young lady, and he says his daughter is suffering untold agony and will probably die of her injuries.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 17 September 2000, p.3E:

By Glenn Hodges, Messenger-Inquirer

The day justice died in Hancock: Mob lynched black man in 1897 for sexual assault on white girl; hanging 'an awful sight'

The loop of a farmer's plowline was tightened around Raymond Bushrod's neck, and the slack end of the rope was thrown over a branch of a poplar tree 15 feet above the courthouse yard in Hawesville.

The line drew taut, and the 20-year-old Bushrod was pulled slowly upward. The mob that had gathered below cheered, and a hundred women who stood on Lover's Leap and the other hills surrounding the courthouse waved white handkerchiefs in wild glee. Within minutes, the only known lynching in Hancock County history was over, and an angry mob's lust for vigilante justice was gratified.

Hawesville had endured many incidents of violence since becoming a town in the 1830s. A street gunfight that was reported nationally in Harper's Weekly in 1859. Shelling by a Union

gunboat and field artillery during the Civil War. But none of those events compared to that illegal hanging on the sunny Sunday afternoon of Sept. 26, 1897.

It was committed outside the door of the county's seat of justice and within a stone's throw of four houses of worship.

It came at the end of a turbulent summer when lynchings of blacks were rampant across the South and some states of the Midwest. And it occurred after inflammatory stories about those illegal hangings in local newspapers had produced an incendiary climate that may have unwittingly incited citizens to take the law into their own hands.

As the 103rd anniversary of the lynching approaches, a retelling of the deeds of that Sunday provides a revealing critique of a dismal decade in American history when the first segregation laws took root in the South and white supremacy was solidly entrenched. It shows that the mob's action was more than an angry retaliation to a violent crime. Moreover, it underscores how in their reporting of the story, the Hawesville and Owensboro newspapers of the 1890s accurately reflected Southern society's resolve that, according to the common rallying cry of that day, "white women must be protected from black rapists."

The events ending with Bushrod's death started about 5 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 25, near Petrie on the Texas Railroad three miles west of Hawesville. Fifteen-year-old Maggie Roberts, daughter of farmer Ben Roberts, had been at the store at Petrie and was walking down the railroad toward home when she was hit on the back of the head with a rail coupling pin, knocked down and - according to news reports - sexually assaulted.

Maggie screamed, but her attacker fled by the time three neighbors - Fred Petrie, John Beauchamp and Ed Muffett - came to her rescue.

After the assault was reported, a communitywide manhunt ensued, and Bushrod was captured about three hours after the alleged attack. He was found under the platform of the Falcon Station, a railroad stop at the mining community four miles west of Petrie.

Bushrod, who came from Rockport, Ind., had been released from the Hancock County jail three weeks earlier after serving 130 days for stealing a watch. He was reported drunk in Hawesville on Saturday and ordered out of town by the marshal. He was last seen walking down the railroad.

After being captured, Bushrod was taken to the Roberts' home where, it was reported, Maggie identified him as the man who attacked her.

"It was with much effort that Mr. Roberts was prevented from shooting him (Bushrod)," Editor Clarence Sterett wrote later in the Hancock Clarion. "A colored neighbor wanted (Bushrod) hung in front of his house."

At nightfall, Bushrod was taken by wagon to the jail in Hawesville. All along the way from Falcon to Hawesville, Bushrod's captors passed angry crowds of men on the road, and Bushrod lay flat in the bed of the wagon, unnoticed in the darkness.

Few people knew until Sunday morning that Bushrod had been captured, but then the news spread quickly. There was a lot of talk about a hanging. So much, in fact, that lawmen thought of moving Bushrod to Louisville or Owensboro. By early afternoon, the streets of Hawesville filled with people.

Rumors flowed that there would be an attempt to put Bushrod on an eastbound train, and that a militia company from Owensboro would come Sunday night to protect him. The mob soon prevented that from happening by blocking all avenues of escape from town.

As the 4:55 p.m. eastbound train pulled into Hawesville, the lawmen tried to divert the mob's attention and rush Bushrod out of town on horseback. The attempt failed. At 5:05, thinking

the militia might be coming, the mob finally rushed the jail. They streamed to the basement cell where Bushrod was held and overpowered Sheriff John Fuqua and Jailer William Brown.

Half pulling and carrying Bushrod, the mob brought him across the street toward the courthouse. A woman brandishing a riding whip urged them on, newspapers reported. Several times men in the crowd hit Bushrod with their fists, and one struck him with a brick.

Shaking and trembling, Bushrod confessed to the crime while members of the mob looked for a rope, according to witnesses. "I am guilty, I am sorry, I hope I will die easy," he reportedly said.

Bushrod knelt to pray and then passed out and lay helpless on the sidewalk while his legs and hands were pinned, Sterett wrote.

The mob, estimated to be as many as 500 people, moved quickly after finding the rope and hanged Bushrod in the tree on the west side of the present courthouse midway between the gate and corner.

A slight drawing up of the legs was the only evidence of pain.

"It was an awful sight. Sickening and pitiful," wrote a reporter from the Owensboro Daily Inquirer, who had rushed to Hawesville by train and witnessed the lynching.

Sterett added: "When the body was still, the leader of the mob (a man named Schaeffer from Cannelton) stepped aside and doffed his hat, saying: 'This is the protection we offer our wives and daughters.'"

With those words the mob slowly dispersed and Bushrod's body hanged there for 40 minutes before Coroner A.G. Mitchell had it cut down.

A jury of six men gathered. After hearing some testimony, they arrived at a verdict that Bushrod came to his fate at the hands of "unknown parties." One jurymen, George W. Newman, refused to sign the verdict, saying insufficient effort had been made to identify members of the mob.

Kentucky Gov. William Bradley was notified, and he offered a \$500 reward for the arrest and conviction of each or any member of the Hawesville mob. But no one stepped forward to collect the money.

Bushrod's body was taken to an undertaker in Hawesville, and when the dead man's family did not claim him, the remains were shipped by train to the Louisville Medical Society.

News of the lynching spread quickly. The Owensboro Daily Messenger printed an extra edition about the hanging that was on the street by daylight on Monday, and several hundred issues were distributed in Hancock County.

The hanging was the talk of the town as a large crowd gathered in Hawesville on Monday. The reporter from the Daily Inquirer said he couldn't find a single person who disapproved of the mob's action.

"Some of the farmers say their wives insisted on their coming to town yesterday," he wrote. "And it is a fact that the women were as much worked up and as vehement in their cries for vengeance as the men.

"Everyone seems to be in sympathy with the action of the mob, and it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to convict anyone for taking part in it."

The Owensboro Daily Messenger's lead news story on Monday expressed public opinion in even more vicious terms: "The brutal outrage upon the person of little Maggie Roberts has been avenged and another black fiend, confessedly guilty, has learned that the penalty for rape is rope. There is no use to moralize over it - no use to call down maledictions upon the state or the officers.

Right or wrong, as long as black brutes outrage white women, just that long will citizens swing the brutes to a convenient limb."

In the following week, some white residents did step forward to condemn the lynching, but it was all too late.

In years to come, as new generations were born, memories of the terrible lynching on that Sunday afternoon were erased by time. Few people in the 20th century knew about the event until an account of the lynching was reprinted in a county sesquicentennial edition of the Hancock Clarion in 1979.

Only a few years before that, the hanging tree died and was chopped down with little mention of the lawless deed that had taken place there. The symbol of what was the darkest day in Hancock County history finally disappeared forever.



Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 18 December 1895, p.1:

TWO WOULD-BE RAPISTS.

Their Arrest at Rockport, Ind. Causes Mob Talk.

Rockport, Ind., Dec. 16. – Two colored men were arrested here yesterday for attempted rape. Raymond Bushrod for attempting to rape a white woman named Matilda Jones, and James Grimes for attempting to rape a colored girl nine years old named Hunter.

Both are in the county jail, but there is considerable bad feeling manifested, and a lynching here at any time would be no surprise.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday 11 April 1897, p.8:

Hawesville Clarion – Raymond Bushrod, a young colored man from Rockport, Ind., is in jail here for theft. He had been stopping a few days with Willis Clark, who lives in the upper part of the county, when on Monday he, with Clark's \$25 gold watch, disappeared.



Hancock Clarion, Hawesville, KY, Thursday, 19 April 1956:

Gone – But Not Forgotten - - -

Lynch- Tree In Courthouse Yard Removed

The accompanying picture portrays an old landmark in Hawesville that is being removed, and with its removal we are reminded of a strange incident connected with this aged tree. It was from an overhanging limb of this old tree that Hawesville had its first and only lynching in the years that are gone. We thought it would be of interest to recall some of the incidents of this hanging that we have gathered from some of our older citizens who remember it recall the events of that day nearly sixty years ago.

Raymond Bushrod, a negro. of the county was the victim of that lynching, and from the recounting of the tales that we have heard it was a hectic day on that Sunday. September 26, 1897. Many of the stories told at this later day is largely remembrances of some of those who, as boys, recall the event and the thrills that they had at the time

It was on a Saturday, as recounted by one of our older citizens, that the sheriff (thought to have been Tom Kelly), searched for the negro and found him hiding beneath the station platform at what is now Adair. The victim was brought to Hawesville and secreted out during the night in the cemetery and on Sunday morning was placed in jail, No one seems to be sure who the jailer was at that time but some think it was Tom Patterson.

On Sunday morning people began congregating in Hawesville and soon an angry mob was in the making. It was reported that the State Militia had been called for and was to arrive on the train that day. Watchers were posted on the hill at 'Lovers' Leap' and other locations to watch and see if the militia was to arrive.

Fearing the arrival of the militia the mob soon got our of control and rushed the jail and took the Negro from his cell, but not before some confusion. When the cell door was broken open the Negro was hidden behind the door and it was thought that he had escaped and a wide search began. It was soon learned that he had not escaped and was taken from the jail by the mob The victim was subjected to a great deal of abuse and then a rope was secured and put around his neck and thrown over the limb of the tree that overhung the sidewalk. The lynchers soon hoisted the victim aloft and he was dangling from the end of the rope.

Many of the older citizen, of today recount incidents of that day of the hanging. A well-known retired merchant in Hawesville recalls that he received fourteen whippings that day as his father would find him in the street and would spank him and send him home, but the boy would soon be back in the midst of the throng. Another citizen recalled that he had climbed into the tree before the hanging and when the Negro was brought to the tree to be hanged, this boy hurriedly slid down and hid himself.

Alter nearly three score years it is difficult to get a complete picture of the hanging, but the aged tree is there to give evidence that it was from one of its limb that Raymond Bushrod was hanged. During the years since that day this tree has grown and cast its shadow across the Courthouse grounds and many have been the citizens who have sat in its shade and many have been the stories and conversations that have been carried on in that Courthouse shadow. The aged Hall of Justice was outraged that day in 1897 and for the first and only time Hawesville was the scene of mob violence.

The old tree is being cut down because of its decaying condition that threatens to cause it to fall and perhaps crush the Memorial Soldiers' Monument that graces the corner of the Courthouse grounds.

As the generations come and go, and time goes on, the old tree with its overhanging branches from which the victim of a mob was hanged in the long ago, will be forgotten and the tragedy of that day will fade from the memory of men, and the incident that occured there will be erased to of the be recalled no more.



Hancock Clarion, Hawesville, KY, Thursday, 19 April 1956:

The Editorial Page

Incidents In The Life Of A Tree

Elsewhere in this issue is the story of the cutting down of the aged tree in the Courthouse yard and an incident of the long ago that is attached to this old tree.

In the years that are past many communities like Hawesville, being the seat of government of counties, have experienced incidents in their history that are outstanding events. In the past, lynching was a more common event than now, and some of those lynchings recall that men are sometimes drawn into mob violence, little thinking what the result might be.

It was on a Sunday September day in 1897 that such an event came to Hawesville. With the passing of nearly three score years much of the stigma of that day has been removed from the minds of our people. We would forget the incident and desire that it had never happened, but the cutting down of the aged tree from which the victim of that lynching hung has brought it to mind and as a last remembrance we expect the incident to be forgotten.

In the life of old trees there is always a history that could be recorded if the tree could recount them. This giant tree in the Hawesville Courthouse yard could recount many stories of interest if it could speak. The lynching that took place from its limb in the in the long ago was but one of the events that could be recalled by this tree. Many have been the boys and girls who have played around its base, hiding their eyes and counting to the traditional one hundred as their companions scampered away to hide and to be found. Youngsters of the long ago now grown old in years have sat in the shade of this aged tree as they listened to the stories of their elders.

Perhaps under the shadow of this tree then but a youngster itself, men gathered in the sixties to march away to the South or to the North to battle for a cause that they thought just, many of them never to return. And as the years went by others were gathered there to march away to fight for the freedom of our country and of the world in 1917-18, and again in the 1940's.

In its shadow now rests a white marble monument erected by our people in remembrance of those boys who went from our homes to fight for freedom and many of them rest beyond the seas in fields where poppies grow and in tropical isles in the far Pacific. What stories this old tree could recite if it could talk. And now it is being removed and its own history ended.

In the twilight of evening in the past as lovers sat in the shadows of this great old tree and whispered their sweet nothings the old tree shielded them from the passing throng and from its shadows homes have been builded and families reared, and generations have come and gone.

Politicians have spoken from platforms under its branches and loud have been the huzzahs that have rung from the throats of those who listened. Perhaps in the years gone by. A. O. Stanley stood under this tree and spoke in his inimitable manner, and Dave Kincheloe, with his golden voice pleasing rhetoric gave forth his orations that are to be remembered by many today. Ed Morrow also spoke the shadow of this great old tree and in his matchless manner recounted the principles of the Republican party as had Stanley and Kincheloe those of the Democratic. Others of great or lesser note have orated in the shade of this tree that is now being removed from the earth.

Within the walls of the aged Courthouse, bathed in the shade of this old tree, nameless courts have been held and judges sat on the bench to dispense justice and to bring accord among men. To our remembrance comes the names of Judges Owen, Birkhead, Wilson, Stack and Neal, and now Judge Bratcher is the presiding judge. Within its walls have gathered judges to try men for crimes and to bring in sentences that have taken men from their homes to spend years behind prison walls. If the old tree could speak or the Courthouse walls reecho the events that have occurred, a varied history of mankind would be spoken.

We are living in a new day — just as every generation is a new day — and the events of the past grow dim in memory and fade away as our penile grown from youths to old age, pass from this mortal scene below. The aged landmarks stand as remembrances of the history that has been recorded, and as time goes on even these landmarks grow old and are removed and new ones take their places. Ever down the ages when men live and die, history is being made, and we recall the events that occur when fresh in mind, and then they grew dim in memory and pass away with our passing.

We might repeat the words of the poet and say: “Woodman spare that tree, but perhaps it is best that it should go and the events that are recorded by its history be forgotten and a new life by engendered and a new outlook brought into being as the world moves on.



Additional notes by Jerry Long

Raymond Bushrod was lynched by a mob on 26 September 1897 in Hawesville, the county seat of Hancock County, KY. He was hanged from a tree near the courthouse. The tree remained in the courtyard until it was removed in 1956. The mob of men, women and children was estimated as being about 500 or 600. Bushrod was accused of the rape of Maggie Roberts that occurred on 25 September 1897. She was the 14-year-old daughter of Ben Roberts of Petrie station, on the Texas railroad about three miles west of Hawesville.

Reports of Bushrod’s lynching were covered in almost every state in the Union. The Chicago Tribune (1 January 1898, p.20) listed Bushrod as being one of 128 lynchings in the States during 1897. The vast majority were African Americans. The newspaper, Owensboro Messenger (27 September 1897, p.1), stated it was the first lynching ever in Hancock County.

Newspapers reported that Bushrod confessed to his crime and it was the third rape he had been accused of. He had previously served three years in a reformatory for the rape of a white girl in Spencer County, IN and 138 days in the Hawesville Jail for theft of a watch from Willis Clark.

Since his parents could not pay a charge of \$8.00 to have their son’s body shipped to them for burial Raymond Bushrod’s remains were sent to the Louisville Medical College.

The Cannelton, IN newspaper, Cannelton Telephone (30 September 1897, p.2), recorded that Raymond Bushrod was a resident of Rockport, in Spencer County, Indiana, where his parents were living. Bushrod, age 24, “was born on a farm 3 miles north of Rockport.” Raymond, age 4, born Indiana, in the 1880 federal census of Spencer County, IN is listed as a son in the home of Horace Bushrod (30, born KY) and Vina (24, born KY). Raymond was one of ten children born to his mother. His father was a farm laborer. Horace & Vina Bushrod are also listed in the 1870 census of Spencer County, IN.

In Hancock County, KY Marriage Return Book 1866-1914 it is recorded that Horace Bushroth married Melvina Rooks on 2 February 1869. Horace Bushrod (1845-1935) & Vina (1845-1910) were buried in the Coulter - Johnson Cemetery in Spencer County, IN. The cemetery is located in Ohio Township on the south side of East County Road 350 North about 0.4 miles east of its intersection with US Highway 231.

Horace Bushrod after the death of his wife, Vina, married Mrs. Emma (Hyde) Martin on 22 June 1915. On their Spencer County, IN marriage bond it was reported that he was 63 years old, was a resident of Grandview, IN, was born in Daviess County, KY and his parents were John Kaiser Bushrod & Emma Malindy. Horace Bushrod at the time of the 1870 Spencer County census

was living with his parents, who were listed as Kiger Bushrod (56, born KY) & Matilda (58, born KY). John K. Bushrod, age 60, & wife, Linda, age 59 were also enumerated in the 1880 census of Spencer County, IN. Horace Bushrod had a brother, John Kige(r) Bushrod (born c1842), who is listed in the 1880, 1900, 1910 & 1920 censuses of Hancock County, KY and died near Lewisport in Hancock County on 13 August 1923. His death certificate recorded that John Kige Bushrod was about 80, was born in Daviess County, KY to John Kige Bushrod & Malinda Lee and he was buried in the Bushrod graveyard.



John Kiger Bushrod, Jr. (c1842-1923)

Horace & John K. Bushrod and their parents were born during the days of slavery and consequently could not be found in the 1850 and 1860 federal censuses which predate emancipation. Their father, John Kiger Bushrod, born c1814 KY is possibly the son of John Bushrod, who was born c1775 in Virginia and appears as a free Black in the 1850 census of Dubois County, IN, a neighboring county of Spencer County, IN. The household of John Bushrod was recorded in the 1850 census as:

	age	race	occupation	born
Bushrod, John	75	Black	farmer	Virginia
Sarah	65	Black		Virginia
Charlotte	20	Black		Kentucky

John owned real estate valued at \$300

Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation it was an extreme rarity that Blacks were free and owned their own land.

The victim of Raymond Bushrod's crime, Maggie Roberts, was Margaret Lena Roberts, who was the daughter of Benjamin Henry Roberts & Martha Jane Carder. Maggie was born in Hancock County, KY on 2 April 1883. She married William Calvin Sadler on 9 October 1901 in Hawesville, KY. She died in Louisville, KY on 23 December 1964 and was buried at the Union Baptist Church Cemetery, at Utility, in Hancock County, KY.

Woody W. Maglinger, III, compiled and published in 2004 a master thesis that included a detailed analysis of the lynching of Raymond Bushrod and racial violence in Western Kentucky – Dark Days in the Ohio Valley: Three Western Kentucky Lynchings, 1884-1911. Copies of the

189-page book can be found in many libraries, including in the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library in Owensboro, KY (KR 364.134 Magl). It can also be found and downloaded on the internet in the digital collection of the Western Kentucky University:

