

Lynchings in Daviess County

By Jerry Long
c.2024



Lynching of Joseph Richardson on
26 September 1913 in Leitchfield, KY



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History of Daviess County, Kentucky
Inter-State Publishing Co., Chicago, IL, 1883, pp.419-421:

Diary of Joseph Thomas (1822-1911), of Owensboro, KY

Page 420: May 20, 1866 – a negro named "Tom" was tried before City Judge Washburn for rape. On his way to the jail: an unknown party placed one end of a rope over his head, and threw the other end over a limb of a tree in the court-house yard, and the father of the injured girl drew the prisoner up, where he was kept suspended twenty or thirty minutes, and until after he was quite dead.

Page 419: May 21, 1866 – "Tom," a negro boy, hung on the court-house square by a mob;

Page 421: January 27, 1869 – a negro man, committed to jail for rape, was hung in the court-house yard.



Owensboro Monitor, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 23 May 1866, p.3:

MOB LAW IN OWENSBORO!
—
Negro Hung on Public Square!

On the 20th inst. a negro named Tom, was tried by Judge Washburn, City Judge, for attempting to commit a rape upon the daughter, about fourteen years old, of a Mr. Goin, in this county. The evidence before the Court was that the negro had met the girl in the road and made insulting propositions to her — that she tried to escape from him — and threatened force if she did not comply with his wishes. A small boy was near who halloed to the negro, and he desisted. The examining court ordered the boy on to further trial, and whilst he was being carried to the jail, some one, whose name we did not learn, put a rope over the negro's head, lead him across the street, threw the rope over the limb of a tree in the Court House yard, and the father of the girl drew him up. He was suspended some twenty or thirty minutes, and was cut down and carried into the jail yard, where an inquest was held over the body. This is a mere plain statement of facts and whilst 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, and it is no use to go through the mockery of civil trials, if after verdict the prisoner is to be dealt with by a mob. — We might as well abolish courts altogether.



The Nashville Daily Union, Nashville, TN, Thursday, 24 May 1866, p.3:

In another column the [Louisville] Courier has the following:

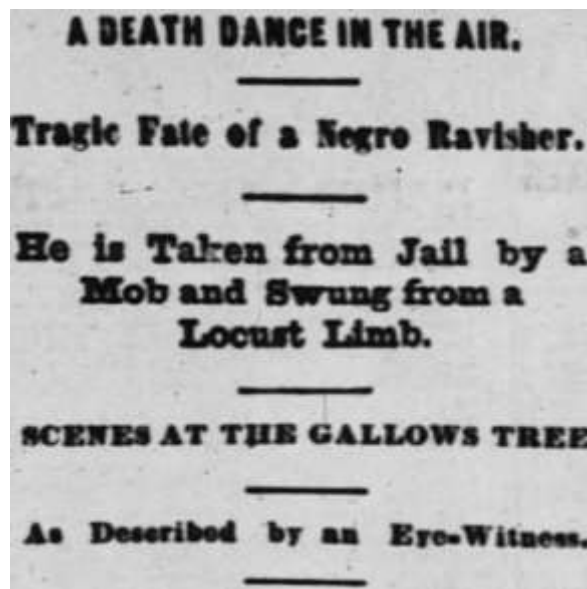
On Saturday last, a negro boy about eighteen years of age, formerly the property of Mrs. Conyers, attempted to commit an outrage on the person of Miss Guine, a very respectable young lady, daughter of a substantial farmer living in Daviess county, near Masonville, and about eight miles back of Owensboro. Miss Guine was fortunate enough to free herself from the grasp of the beastly ruffian and effect her escape without his being able to effect his purpose, Her father being informed of the attempted outrage, pursued the negro, and, overtaking him on a neighboring farm, beat him severely. Returning to his house for his weapons the negro escaped, but was subsequently captured and taken to Owensboro and imprisoned.

On Monday morning the negro was brought before the City Court, J. P. Washburne, Judge, and the evidence conclusively established his guilt, which he also freely confessed. The Judge committed him for further trial, and as he was being returned to the jail he was seized by Mr. Guine and several others, a rope put around his neck, and he was promptly swung to an adjacent tree. The whole thing was done without any excitement or confusion, but few of the citizens being aware of it until after the negro was dead.

Such occurrences are becoming entirely too frequent in this State, and they must be promptly stopped. There is no excuse for mob law. The law is all sufficient for the punishment of crime, and to it all must submit. The people of Kentucky, who are jealous of their reputation, must put a prompt quietus to this alarming and growing evil.



Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, Saturday, 30 January 1869, p.4:



A short time since, a negro went to the house of a highly respectable farmer living some six miles out from Owensboro, about mid-day, and asked for food, saying he was hungry. There were no persons about except the wife and children of the farmer, the former being engaged in cooking dinner for the farm hands. Food was given the negro, and after he had finished eating, he asked where "the men folks" were. The woman replied that her husband was away from home, and that the farm hands were in the field at work. On receiving this piece of information, the negro at once arose, and, going to the door, closed and bolted it, then attacking the helpless woman, he

overpowered and violated her in the presence of her children, despite her cries for mercy. After the black brute had committed the crime, he fled and got well out of the way before it was discovered. At the time of the outrage, it is said, the woman was (?) enceinte.

On the day following the negro was pursued, captured and carried to Owensboro, where, after a preliminary examination before Judge Triplitt, he was committed to jail to await trial in the Circuit Court. Judge Washburne, of Owensboro, was appointed counsel to defend the prisoner, and to him the negro made full confession of his guilt.

Such was the indignation of the people, and more especially of the residents of the neighborhood in which the crime was committed, that there was every reason to be believed they would not wait for the law to take its course, and acting upon these probabilities, the Jailer, Mr. Joseph Mitchell secured the keys of the Jail and put himself out of the way until he believed the excitement had to some extent subsided. On Wednesday night he remained at home, and between ten and eleven o'clock a party of fifteen or twenty armed men, disguised in long beards and mustaches, suddenly appeared at the jail, roused Mr. Mitchell, and, placing revolvers at his head, demanded the keys. At the time his sick wife and his mother-in-law occupied room adjoining the one in which he was found. Seeing that nothing could be gained by resistance, and knowing that he had done all he could to carry out the law, he succumbed to the mob and surrendered the keys.

After obtaining the keys, the lynchers, for such they proved to be, at once repaired to the cell occupied by the negro. They found him secured by heavy chains, which they were unable to remove, and some of them then went to a hardware store and procured an ax, with which they managed to sever the chain which held him to the door. They could do nothing with the chains about his legs, and dragged him out, heavily ironed as he was, and taking him to a locust tree in the Court-house yard, made ready to swing him from the limb on which another negro paid the penalty of a similar crime some time ago. He begged to be allowed to "make few remarks," but his inexorable executioners only replied, "Get up that tree, d--n scoundrel, we don't want any of your remarks." And with this they clumsily adjusted the noose, and, compelling him to climb as well as he could with the irons upon him, they "boosted" him up some distance and then swung him off. The careless adjustment of the rope was such that the neck did not break, and the struggles of the dying negro were terrible. An eye witness declares that fully twenty-five minutes elapsed ere the twitching entirely ceased. The body not cut down, but was still hanging when our informant left Owensboro by the Morning Star steamer on Thursday. It was about four feet from the ground.

The name of the negro is not known, He was yellow in color, and was something of a dandy in dress. It is asserted that he was from Jefferson county, and had but recently left Louisville. It is further alleged that he was a relative of the negro who was lynched on the same locust tree some time since. The lynchers were said to be parties from the neighborhood in which the outrage was committed. They wore no disguises except long beards and mustaches.



Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, Friday, 4 February 1869, p.1:

Owensboro
Further Particulars of the Negro Outrage.
(From the Henderson News, 2d.)

About ten days since, Mrs. Holeman, the wife of a former Union soldier, was going from her house (a few miles from Delaware, near Owensboro), to visit neighbor. On the road, in the

open glare of noonday, she encountered a negro man, who made infamous proposals to the lady, which being resented, the scoundrel laid violent hands her person, and by choking Mrs. H. into a state of insensibility, contrived to outrage her person, and then took to flight. The wronged woman soon gave the alarm – the sooty fiend was pursued vigorously, and finally captured, when the exasperated captors made ready to wreak summary vengeance upon his vile carcass. The sheriff, however, interfered and escorted the rascal to the jail at Owensboro. Upon last Wednesday night, a party of men on horseback visited the jail, and, in party imitation of the Seymour lynchers, placed their pistols against the head of the jailer, and demanded the negro raper. Resistance was futile, and the villain was soon dangling from the limb of a tree in proximity to the jail.

We suppose these "vigilants" will be called "Kukluxers." If so, our sympathies go with them, although our reason tells us their act was contrary to law. We should all bow to the majesty of the law, but when it is known that the brutal violence of this infamous criminal caused the premature birth of child by the lady upon whom the outrage was committed, we must have charity for the very natural feelings of human nature, and all acknowledge that this worthless negro's life but poorly repays the deep and damning wrong he perpetrated. Kuklux or no Kuklux-law or no law – we are bound to feel that the men who helped to hang that negro should never be prosecuted.



Daviess County, Kentucky Celebrating Our Heritage, 1815-2015
(Evansville, IN, M. T. Publishing Company, Inc., 2015, pp.11-12):

Daviess County Bicentennial Chronology
200 Historical Events

By Jerry Long

- 1884, 7-13 Dick May, a Negro, was taken by a mob from the jail and lynched from a tree near the southeast corner of the courthouse. He was reported to be the third man hanged by a mob in the courthouse yard. He was accused of attacking the 17-year old daughter of Sod Kelly on 4 July 1884. Jailer William J. Lucas bravely tried to protect his prisoner and was shot and died about two hours later from his wound.
- 1889, 12-19 Dock Jones, a Negro, was taken by a mob from the jail and lynched from a tree in the yard of the courthouse. The previous day he shot barber, John Westerfield, who died about two hours later. Westerfield reportedly ran him out of his barbershop for being drunk. Newspapers at the time reported that since the Civil War five Negroes have been lynched in the Daviess Courthouse yard, two for murder & three for crimes against women.
- 1896, 12-26 Alfred Holt, a Negro, was taken by a mob from the jail and lynched from a tree in the yard of the courthouse. He was on trial for the murder of policeman, Aquilla White, who was shot to death on 4 November 1896.
- 1902, 7-17 Josh Anderson was taken from the jail and lynched by a mob. He had shot to death his wife, Millie, on 8 July 1902. He was hanged from the city scales on the south side of the courthouse lawn. He was the only white to have been lynched by a mob in the county; prior to this one white had been legally executed by hanging in 1854.



Lynching of Dick May – 13 July 1884:

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 8 July 1884, p.4:



Sod Kelly's Daughter Saved by a Small Pet Dog From a Ravisher,
Who is Lodged in Jail – Talk of a Mob.

Richard May, a young negro, was arrested Sunday and lodged in jail for one of those most revolting offenses which, of late, are of such frequent occurrence all over the country – attempted rape.

May has been in the employ of Mr. Sod Kelly, a respectable farmer, who lives two miles above the city, for seven years, and he was trusted and respected by all the family. Last Friday Mr. Kelly, his wife, one of his daughters and the negro, May, went to a tobacco bed on the farm to draw plants, leaving another daughter, about seventeen years old, who had been almost an invalid for two or three years, in the house. May made some excuse to return to the house, and soon after Mrs. Kelly heard her daughter scream. She returned to the house to find out what was the matter, and found the poor girl on a pallet on the floor trembling and, weeping, and weak from fear.

Not until Saturday evening was she induced to tell her mother that the negro, on returning to the house, had thrown her down on the pallet and attempted to outrage her person, and she was only saved by a small pet dog, which jumped at him and bit him on the cheek. He stopped to fight off the dog, when she found the opportunity to scream, and the negro then ran out of the house, first telling her if she told he would kill her.

The mother's indignation was thoroughly roused, and she sought out the negro, who was still on the premises. and belabored him with a stick. Singular to say, however, he did not leave the place, nor did Mrs. Kelly tell her husband of the brutal act until Sunday morning, after hiding his gun and all other weapons about the place to prevent him from killing the negro. When Mr. Kelly learned of the deed he flew into a terrible rage, and attacked the negro with his fists, but he got away. Mr. Kelly then came to town and swore out a warrant, and taking Officer G. F. Reynolds with him, returned to the neighborhood, to search for the negro. By this time fifteen or twenty of the neighbors had heard the news, and were searching for the brute with guns. While Mr. Kelly and others were hunting in one locality for him, Mr. Reynolds found him in another, hiding in the bushes on the river bank. He took him with him in his buggy, and hurried him off to jail before the others knew of the arrest.

Coming to the city the negro confessed all the girl alleged, but he declared that he had been making indecent proposals to her for two years, and while she had never acquiesced, she had never repulsed him outright.

This is highly improbable, especially in consideration of the girl's delicate health, and is an aggravation of his beastly offense. The girl, it is said, is so feeble that she is never able to sit up a whole day at a time.

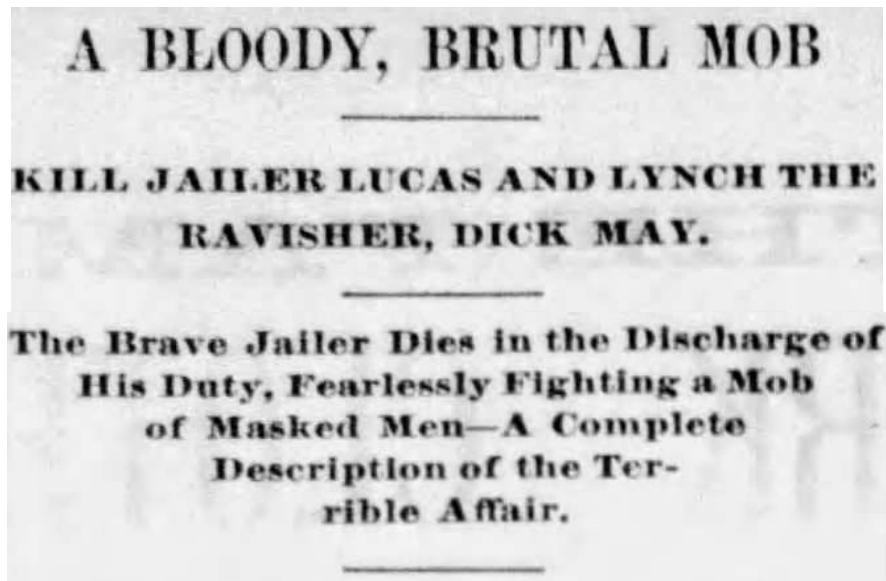
What is most singular about this case is the lack of excitement concerning it up to the present.

Very few in the city knew anything about it yesterday, but in the evening there were rumors of a mob from the country, who would attack the jail during the night. In view of this the jailer procured a strong guard, who were on watch all night.

Sod Kelly formerly lived in Indiana, opposite the city, but removed to Kentucky after the flood of 1883.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 15 July 1884, p.4



The mob that had been expected for a week, arrived Sunday night, and after killing Jailer Lucas, broke into the jail and took out the negro, Dick May, who attempted to ravish Sod Kelly's daughter, and hanged him to a tree in the court-house yard.

The alleged offense was committed on Friday, the 4th of July, and the negro was arrested on the following Sunday morning. Up to that time, and even until Monday, very few people in Owensboro knew anything about it, and but for the rumors of the coming of the mob several nights last week, it is not probable there would have been any excitement in the city.

TALK OF THE MOB.

commenced on Monday of last week, and the jailer applied to the county judge for a guard. The county judge appointed Mr. Chas. Haney a special bailiff, and empowered him to summon several assistants. There was no evidence of a mob Monday night, but it was reported that one was organized Tuesday night in Murray's woods. It did not materialize, however. Wednesday night all was quiet, but on Thursday night there was unmistakable evidence that trouble was in the wind. A gathering of thirty or forty men was seen in the vicinity of the toll-gate, but they disbanded about

3 o'clock in the morning without attacking the jail. It was then thought that all danger of a mob was over, that the crowd who had undertaken the matter

HAD NOT THE NERVE.

to come in. Investigations by various county and city officers on Friday confirmed this belief, and the county judge, acting upon the advice of prominent citizens, ordered the guard dismissed. Friday and Saturday nights all was quiet, but by bed time Sunday night the city was again full of rumors. A number of persons, who believed the mob would surely come, sat up to witness its actions, and they were not disappointed.

About 1:30 A. M. a squad of horsemen rode down Fourth street and turned in Daviess, and came down Third to St. Ann. At the same time another squad came down Main street, and a few appeared on Frederica. The court square was thus

COMPLETELY SURROUNDED

by the pickets, who refused, with drawn pistols, to allow any citizen to go near the jail. The leader and seven or eight men dismounted and walked from the opera-house corner over toward the jail. Jailer Lucas, who had been apprised of their coming, was standing on the pavement at the gate at the side of the jailer's residence, He called out to them, "Halt!"

The group of men paused for an instant and asked, "Who are you?"

He replied, "I am Lucas, the jailer, and

"YOU CAN'T COME IN HERE."

The men continued to advance, and he ran around the house and up the back stairway, and leaning over the railing of the gallery as they reached the gate, cried out to them, "Don't come in that gate. I will shoot the first man that does." Several shots were fired then by the mob, probably in the air to intimidate the jailer, and he opened fire upon them from the gallery. His voice could be distinctly heard above the din of the fire, "I'll be G d d if I give up the jail; I'll swear to God I'll never give him up to you!

"I'LL DIE FIRST!"

And the leader of the mob would repeatedly call out, as each shot was fired, "Give; him up!" At the same time others were trying to batter in the front door, and smashed in one of the parlor windows. Tommy Lucas, the jailer's son, fired six shots out of one of the upstairs front windows into the mob, and it was thought two or three of the men were certainly wounded. After the jailer had fired seven shots, a shot from one of the mob struck him in the right breast, and he fell back on the floor of the gallery with

A TERRIBLE GROAN.

Mrs. Lucas and Tommy picked him up and carried him into the family room and laid him on the bed, and Tommy started out the back way to go for a physician. But the mob, which at first had been to some extent intimidated by the hot firing of the jailer and his son, had been induced by the leader, who first coaxed and begged and then cursed at them, to go into the yard, had ascended the stairway and stopped him at the muzzle of their pistols,

DEMANDING THE KEYS.

to the jail. He told them his father had hid them, and they would have to find them. Mrs. Lucas appealed to them to let the boy pass and get a physician for her wounded and dying husband, but they would not. Tommy then turned and went down the front stairway and out the front door, but he was again halted. The appeal made to the men here had its effect and he was allowed to go. But again at the opera-house corner he was stopped. Dr. Todd, who was on Megills corner, heard his appeal to the pickets, and volunteered to go to the relief of the wounded man, and he, Esquire George Adams and a representative of the MESSENGER were allowed to pass the lines.

By this time the mob had commenced

BATTERING THE JAIL DOOR.

with a sledge hammer. Seeing that further resistance was useless, and that the noise and excitement was dangerous for the wounded jailer, Dr. Todd told Mrs. Lucas to give up the keys, and she sent them out. By this time the lock had been so badly battered, however, that the key would not work in it, and the battering was resumed until

THE LOCK GAVE WAY.

With the keys the inner door was unlocked, and then the men made for the cells. They first went to cell No. 6, and pointing their pistols through the bars they commanded the prisoners in it to walk up and show their faces. The trembling wretches advanced, exclaiming that the man they wanted was in No. 5. They went to No. 5 and unlocked it, and

DRAGGED THE POOR DEVIL.

they were after from under the lower berth. He begged for time to pray, but they hurried him out of the doorway, leaving the doors of the jail open. Going down the stairway one of the men was heard to say to the negro, "Come along!" He humbly replied, "I'm coming," but made no other remark afterward. It was the intention of the mob at first to hang him to a shade tree on the pavement in front of the jailer's residence, but it was afterward determined to hang him to a tree in the court-house yard, on the east side. His 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 heavily.

HIS HEELS CRACKED TOGETHER.

convulsively, and then all was over. Instantly the men left, mounted their horses, and all rode quietly out of the city.

Then the spectators, who had previously not been allowed to draw near, rushed into the court-house 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. It was

A GHASTLY, 'SIGHT.

The features were contorted with pain, and the tongue hung out of the mouth. The body was, of course, still warm, but the pulse was gone. Some of the crowd claimed that they could feel the heart still beating. Charlie Haney started to cut the body down, but others objected, and it was allowed to remain hanging until about 8 o'clock in the morning.

THE JAILER'S WOUND.

Dr. Todd found that Mr. Lucas had received a wound in the right breast, about three inches above the nipple, the ball ranging to the left. Internal bleeding had set in, and he saw that the wound would prove fatal. He turned to the MESSENGER'S representative and said at once that there was no hope. He asked Mr. Lucas if he wanted a minister, and the dying jailer requested that Father Gammon be sent for. The priest arrived in a half hour, and administered the usual service. Mr. Lucas was conscious but in great pain for two hours. He bemoaned his fate, and that of his weeping wife and his helpless children. Dr. Hobbs arrived and corroborated Dr. Todd's opinion. Opiates were administered to relieve him of pain, but he died at 6:30 A.M.

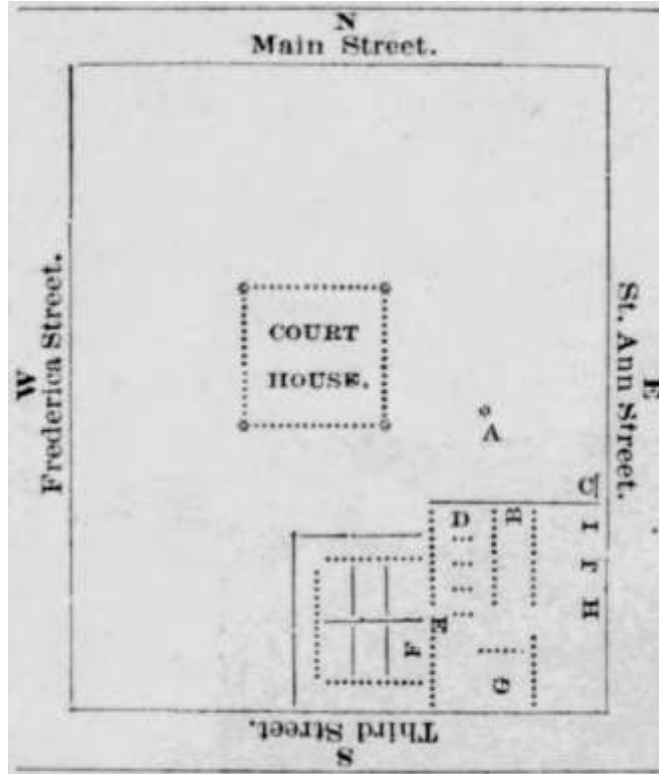
THE ACTION OF LUCAS.

in fighting the mob to the death in the discharge of his duty is considered by everybody a deed of great valor, but his indiscretion was undoubtedly the cause of his death. Being a man of highly irritable and nervous temperament, he allowed the mob every advantage of him. He stood on the gallery in full view, with a lighted lantern behind him, while the mob was concealed behind the

corner, of the house in darkness. Had he taken his position in Tommy's room, as indicated in the diagram below, he could have shot, from behind the door, every man who dared come to the head of the stairs. After a few had been hurt the remainder would have been driven away. Access to the jail was made intentionally difficult when it was constructed, and one man, with plenty of arms, which Lucas had, could ordinarily have kept a large mob at bay.

It is estimated that the mob was composed of from thirty to fifty men. They were well organized under a skillful leader, and did their work quickly and quietly. One of them was heard to say that two of his comrades were wounded, but it has not been learned who they were, or what their injuries amount to.

DIAGRAM OF THE SCENE



- The tree where the negro was hanged.
- The position of Jailer Lucas on the upstairs back gallery firing on the mob.
- The side gate, outside of which the mob stood firing on the jailer.
- Foot of back stairway leading up the jail door.
- Door to Jail.
- Cell in which May was confined.
- Tommy Lucas' room.
- Hall door to the Jailer's residence.
- Parlor window that was broken in.
- Upstairs window from which Tommy Lucas fired on the mob.

Jailer Lucas.

Whilst all good citizens regret the outbreak of mob spirit in the community, still the feeling is general that the negro deserved the fate he met, and the only real sorrow that is felt is over the death of Jailer Lucas, who was killed in the discharge of his duty.

Wm. J. Lucas was born August 5th, 1834, in St. Mary's county, Maryland, where he lived until about the time of the war. He was at the bombardment of Fort Sumpter, and was a member of Gregg's First South Carolina regiment. On October 4th, 1806, he was married to Miss Mildred Summers, in Farquier county, Va., and several years later moved to Kentucky. He was a painter by a trade, and was a poor but hard-working man of an eccentric and peculiar nature. In August, 1882, he was elected jailer of Daviess county, having made an unsuccessful race four years before. He leaves a delicate wife and six children, but one of whom is old enough to assist his mother, Mr. Lucas died in an insolvent condition, but had a life insurance policy for \$4,000. He was reared a Catholic. The funeral will take place this morning, at 10 o'clock, from the St. Stephen's Catholic church.

Dick May.

Dick May, the negro who was hanged, was short and black, and about 23 years old. He had lived with Sod Kelly as a farm-hand for seven years, and was regarded as faithful and reliable until his hellish assault on Kelly's daughter. He never, at any time, denied the charge against him, but maintained all the time that he had been on intimate terms with the girl for nearly two years; that he had repeatedly made indecent proposals to her, to which she had never given her consent, but had never repulsed him. While in jail he read his Bible and prayed continually, and told the jailer he could not sleep. On Monday night of last week, fearing the mob, the jailer took him out of the jail and put him in one of the jury rooms in the court-house, with handcuffs and shackles on. On Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights he put him upon the roof of the jail, there being a flat place near the eaves of the house adjoining, where he could lie down on his blankets. Saturday and Sunday nights, thinking all danger was over, he allowed him to stay in his cell. May told Mr. Lucas last week that he believed he had made his peace with his God, and asked if the mob should come and hang him that he be buried decently in a new suit of clothes he had at Kelly's.

Notes and Comments.

There are already candidates for jailer.

Russellville hanged her negro one Sunday night, and Owensboro the next.

The leader of the mob rode a white horse, and his pistol glistened in the darkness.

The coroner's jury in the inquest over Jailer Lucas' body will not report until Thursday.

The entrances to the court-house are heavily draped in mourning in respect to the dead jailer.

This is the third man hanged by a mob in the court-house yard in the history of the county. Another man was once hanged in another part of the county.

Mrs. Lucas has been appointed by Judge Atchison a committee to take charge of the jail, with her son Tommy as deputy, until a successor of Mr. Lucas is elected in August.

The members of the mob who participated actively in the lynching wore masks of black cambric. Several others were unmasked, and many of them appeared to be beardless youths.

The newspapers all over the United States will contain accounts of the lynching this morning. A number of papers in different sections of the country telegraphed the MESSENGER for specials.

Comparatively few people in the city knew anything of the lynching until the sun rose. Not more than thirty persons witnessed the work of the mob, and less than a hundred visited the scene before dawn.

There will be a meeting of the officers and members of the Daviess county courts in the county court room this morning at 8 o'clock to pass suitable resolutions concerning the death of W. J. Lucas.

Every night while the mob was expected Mrs. Lucas and her children were invited to stay with friends, but, like the brave woman that she is, she announced that she would stay with her husband until the last.

Don't think, dear reader, that our artist has unwittingly made the jail appear larger than the court-house, in our diagram elsewhere. The jail being the object of interest it was intentionally made the larger.

It was evident yesterday that the negroes in the city were very much excited. They stood in groups conversing all day. In the evening it was reported that they would organize a mob to hang Sod Kelly and his daughter. Very little credence is given this report.

There are many wild, absurd rumors afloat which have no foundation. How they could have been started is a mystery. The MESSENGER had two representatives on the scene, who watched closely every movement, and what is contained in these columns may be relied upon as strictly accurate.

The excitement was high yesterday morning, many men, women and children visiting the scene of the lynching. There was great indignation at the brutal work of the mob. The murder of the brave jailer was condemned on every hand. Everybody seems to feel keenly the disgrace upon the county.

A public meeting of the citizens of the county should be held to commemorate the act of heroism which led to the death of the jailer. A fund for the benefit of the widow and orphans should also be raised. We believe there are one thousand men in Daviess county who would gladly give one dollar each to this fund. Let us raise it.

Just before the mob arrived the ferry bell rang on this side and a horn was blown on the other side of the river, and soon several persons crossed over from Indiana. It is believed that they were old neighbors of Sod Kelly. He formerly lived in the little white house opposite the city, that was carried away by the last flood.

It was reported and generally believed that the mob intended to hang Silas Clark, a negro who is in jail for robbery, who is accused of committing a similar act to the one for which May was hanged, also, but having shot the jailer, they weakened. They brought two ropes, leaving the one unused lying in the court-house yard. They left their sledge-hammer and two or three masks, also.

One of the many absurd stories that were out yesterday morning was that Dr. Simon Lockhart was one of the mob and was wounded. Dr. Lockhart appeared on the streets in a few hours and denied positively the former statement, saying he was professionally engaged in the country until after midnight, and, like all good citizens, he had no sympathy with the mob. His presence contradicted the latter statement.

In 1875, when Mr. Jo Slaughter was jailer, a mob attacked the jail and attempted to get Owen Cain, a white man who killed a man and his wife named Summers, in the Buzzard Roost, over an old grudge, with an axe. They knocked at the jailer's door for admittance about 1 A. M., but Mr. Slaughter kept still until a gun was fired. He then threw open the shutters of an upstairs window, and cried out, "Fire on them, boys!" and, though he had no one but his wife with him,

commenced firing into the mob, and the men were routed. They did not come back. In that instance, also, a guard had been kept at the jail, but was dismissed, the authorities thinking all danger was over. Cain was afterward tried and sent to the penitentiary for four years, it being developed in the trial that it was not such a bad case against him as was thought. He was pardoned after a year and returned to this county, but in a short time removed to the Purchase.

AN IMPENDING RIOT.

Rumors and Signs of Some Ugly Conduct on the Part of the Blacks.

There was a great deal of suppressed excitement on the streets at midnight, last night, over the reported threats by the negroes of vengeance upon Sod Kelly, Judge Atchison and others, for the lynching of May. Their ire was aroused against Kelly because they think he incited the mob, and against Judge Atchison because he withdrew the guard from the jail after Thursday night.

Kelly, who lives four miles above the city, was informed of the threats late in the evening, and he sent his family to Yelvington, and stood guard on his premises last night with about twenty-five faithful friends.

Judge Atchison was informed by a number of friends last night of the threats made against him, and sent his family away from home, but staid on the streets himself, and said he did not have any fear of personal harm. The MESSENGER was reliably informed at midnight, however, that two notorious negro characters had been dogging his footsteps. The hardware dealers reported, at the close of business last night, that an extraordinary quantity of ammunition had been sold to negroes during the day.

Crowded meetings were held by the blacks on Snow Hill and on the Sisters' field last night. The streets were deserted by them during the early part of the night, which is very unusual.

The county judge attempted to telegraph to the Governor for an order to bring out the Monarch Rifles to protect the city from the riot that seemed impending, but the operator failed to get the dispatch off. Capt. Ford summoned the members of the company, and stood watch with them however, over the arms in the armory, which it was rumored the negroes would attempt to seize. He promised a warm reception to them if they came.

Of the rumors that are afloat it is highly probable that many are groundless, but it is undoubtedly true that there were many ugly signs about. At 3, a. m., the special police were patrolling the streets with guns on their shoulders, and all was quiet.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 22 July 1884, p.1:

ECHOES FROM THE MOB.

The Brave Soldier Who Sacrificed His Life to Duty.

(Special to Louisville Times.)

Baltimore, July 17. – The Sun today says: "Jailer Lucas, who was shot and killed at Owensboro, Ky., Sunday night, while resisting a mob, which was intent on lynching a colored man, was a native of Baltimore and a brother of Mr. J. S. Lucas, of No. 272 Light street. Mr. Lucas was born on High street, but his parents removed to Centerville, Md., where the children were educated. The deceased entered the Confederate service at the breaking out of the late war, in a Maryland command, and was wounded seven times. At the battle of Front Royal he captured one of his brothers, who was a member of Gen. Kenly's command. At the close of the war Mr. Lucas

married Miss Summers, residing near Manassas, and made his home in Virginia until 1872, when he removed to Daviess county, Kentucky, of which county he was elected jailer two years ago.



**Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1943, William Foster Hayes,
Owensboro, KY, Messenger Job Printing Co., 1943, pp.370-378:**

HEROISM AND BLOODLUST

An early happening in this period constitutes one of the few dark blots on the fair record of the city and county, but at the same time reveals the fine heroism, leading (alas!) to martyrdom, of one of their citizens. This shocking and tragic occurrence took place on the Sunday night of July 13, 1884.

A short time before that a Negro named Dick May had been accused of attempting rape on a young white woman living out in the country a few miles from Owensboro. Observe: it was not even charged that a rape had been committed, only that it had been attempted, nor was satisfactory evidence ever produced in support of even that charge. The man had been arrested, however, and lodged in jail. There had been some rumors of mob violence, and at the request of the jailer the county judge had appointed Mr. Chas. Haney a guard at the jail. This was on the Monday preceding the 13th. By the last of the week the rumors had died down, everything seemed quiet, and the guard was dismissed. Whether a guard of one man would have been sufficient if the trouble had developed during that time may well be doubted.

About one-thirty Sunday night (or, of course, Monday morning) a squad of horsemen moved down Fourth Street from the east, then on Daviess to Third, and down Third to St. Ann. Another group came down Main (now Second) Street from the east and a few gathered on Frederica Street. The jail at that time stood on the southeast corner of the courthouse square, from which it was removed in the next few years.

Mr. Wm. J. Lucas, born in Maryland fifty years before but for some years a resident of Kentucky and Daviess County, was the jailer. He had been apprised of the approach of the mob, and standing on the pavement at the side of the jail, which was also his residence, he called out to the approaching men, "Halt, whoever you are! I am Lucas the jailer, and you cannot come in here." The men, however, continued to advance and he ran around the house and up the back stairway, and leaning over the railing of the gallery again shouted, "Don't come in that gate! I will shoot the first man that does." He was answered by shots from the crowd and a leader of the mob called out, "Give him up!" but Lucas stood to his post, saying: "I'll be G—d d—d if I will give up the jail. I swear to God I will never give him up."

In the meantime Tommy Lucas, a son of the jailer, some fifteen or sixteen years of age, had fired half a dozen shots into the mob out of the upstairs front window (as I understand it a window in the south front of the building) and it was thought that two or three of the mob were probably wounded, but this was never ascertained. Mr. Lucas continued to stand his ground, he being at the other end of the building, until he was struck in the right breast by a shot from the mob and fell.

Mrs. Lucas and Tommy carried him in to a bed and Tommy was sent for a doctor. He was stopped by the mob but went out another way and was finally allowed to pass. He was again stopped but Dr. C. H. Todd had heard him and went forward and was allowed to pass in together

with Squire George Adams, a well-known citizen, and (naturally) a representative of the Owensboro Messenger.

In the meantime the mob had been battering the door of the jail with a sledge-hammer. Dr. Todd advised Mrs. Lucas to give up the keys, which she did, but the lock had been battered and could not be used and the hammering was resumed until the lock gave way. The wretched Negro was then secured and immediately hanged on a tree just east of the courthouse.

Medical aid to Mr. Lucas was unavailing and he died at six-thirty that morning. It was thought that he had been indiscreet in taking his position where he stood in full sight of the mob, and that he could probably have kept them out from a room inside the jail, but his courage and heroism were fully recognized and acclaimed, and they should be perpetuated. Mr. Lucas was survived by his wife, who had been Mildred Summers, and six children, some of whom at least will be remembered by many still living in Owensboro.

Judge Lucius P. Little was judge of the Circuit Court at the time, and a short time after the tragedy he brought it to the attention of the grand jury. In a strong and eloquent charge, he pointed out the peculiar heinousness of the two murders. The Messenger too in an early issue excoriated the mob. As usual in such cases however, no one was brought to justice, and indeed no indictment was returned.

Following the death of her husband, Mrs. Lucas desired to fill the office of jailer, a practice which has become customary under such circumstances in recent years. She was indeed elected to the office by the popular vote, but her election was contested on the ground that being a woman she could not hold the office, and in December 1885 the Court of Appeals upheld this contention, deciding that under the state constitution of that day she was ineligible.

A FRUITLESS HOODOO

Although I had neither the aptitude nor the inclination for the practice of criminal law, it so fell out that I was engaged in a very few important and sensational criminal trials. One of these, which will be recalled by some of my older readers, grew out of the murder of Aquila White, a member of the Owensboro police force. This occurred in 1896, probably in the latter part of the year. There was a disturbance in the Negro quarter of the town, and in the discharge of his duty White undertook to investigate it. A shot fired from a group of Negroes toward whom he was advancing killed him, and Alf Holt and several other Negroes were arrested and afterwards indicted for murder.

Mr. White belonged to a highly respected family and was personally popular, and besides he was engaged to be married to an Owensboro girl. All this added peculiar sadness to his death, and naturally excited great indignation against his supposed murderer, and for a time mob violence had been feared. Afterwards however the temper of the people had grown apparently more quiet and at the time of the trial no such violence was apprehended, or at least it was hoped that it would not occur.

Thomas L. Karn, a young lawyer of my own age, and I were appointed by the court to defend Alf Holt, who had no means to employ an attorney. As a matter of professional duty we accepted the appointment and undertook to make such defense as could legitimately be presented. In fact the task did not seem entirely hopeless if we could secure an unprejudiced hearing. The circumstances were such that there seemed to be some uncertainty at least as to who had fired the fatal shot; and as it had been fired in a hasty or spontaneous outbreak it could not have been reasonably urged that the other members of the group than the one who had fired the shot were guilty of murder. And I may say here that to the best of my knowledge no one knows certainly to

this day (unless it may be some surviving member of that group of Negroes) whether or not Alf Holt was the actual perpetrator of the crime.

As I remember him after all these years, Alf Holt was a typical "darky" in appearance, chocolate colored and thick lipped. In character, like many of his race, but a larger proportion than I think than now, he was ignorant, shiftless and given to drink, but he had not been considered dangerous.

After our appointment my associate and I proceeded to prepare as well as we could for the trial. Our client told us a consistent and not unreasonable story. In brief, he said that he was in the crowd of some twelve or fifteen Negroes when the officer approached, but did not fire the shot or see it fired, and had nothing to do with it; thought a certain man whom he named did the shooting, but could not say positively. No questioning could make him change his account of the affair; and in accordance with his statement we of course planned our defense.

Our first effort, however, was a motion for a change of venue to another county, on the ground that the strong feeling against Holt would prevent his obtaining a fair trial in his home county. On the trial of this motion, though it was evident that there was much feeling against him, a number of good citizens testified that Alf could get a fair trial and "justice" there; we were unable to produce any very tangible evidence of prejudice; and the Court refused our application. We were careful to reserve exceptions to the ruling; and a thoughtful friend suggested to me at the time that perhaps we were practicing the case "not wisely, but too well." Certainly we had gained no popular favor by our motion for a change of venue. It is possible indeed that the motion contributed to the tragic outcome of the case.

The trial began just before Christmas, 1896, and when the Commonwealth rested it was near adjourning hour in the evening of the 24th of December. The Court then adjourned until the 26th. The defendant had had no opportunity to testify, no witness for him had been introduced, nor had his counsel made their opening statement. The Court room had been crowded all day, but there had been no disorder, and as the crowd dispersed and the prisoner was led away by the jailer there was no apparent ground for uneasiness — unless, as some afterwards said, the silence was ominous.

By that time the case fully possessed me, and Christmas day brought but little relaxation of the strain. To have the life of a human being, no matter how obscure or humble, depend in some sense or measure on one's efforts, is no light thing; and besides I was to make the opening statement for the defense as soon as Court opened on the following morning, and the substance and arrangement of my speech gripped my mind. In the afternoon I went to the jail for another consultation with Alf, as there were certain points in the case about which I wished to ask him.

The jailer admitted me to the prisoner's cell, and for some time I talked with him about the details of the case, and the evidence we were to introduce. Then, as I was about to leave, he said, "Mr. Hayes, I've thought of somep'n maybe we can do." "What is it?" I asked. "Well," he replied, "You know, down at (naming some town) there's a man, a cullu'd man, that can conjure." "Can what?" I asked. "Can conjure — he can hoodoo 'em," replied Alf. "I've already sent for him," he went on, "and I 'spect he'll be here today." Questioning him further, I saw that he sincerely believed in the efficacy of the "hoodoo" charm. Nor was I able to shake his faith in it; so I left, wondering much at this new revelation of superstition in the character of the ignorant Negro. As I passed through the waiting room, I saw a colored man there, and asked him if he was from that place, and he said he was; and I left him arranging with the jailer for an interview with the prisoner.

The next step in the case was taken without the knowledge of Court or counsel; and I give it as I gathered it from rumors and newspaper reports current at the time. On that Christmas night,

an hour or two after midnight, a few men appeared on the streets of the town, moving quietly and conferring in subdued tones, their number gradually increasing until there were some thirty or forty; then they went in silence to the jail, where one of them knocked on the outer door. As soon as this was unlocked it was pushed open, the men quickly rushed in, overpowered the jailer, and at the point of a pistol compelled him to surrender the keys, opened the necessary doors, and in a few minutes had the trembling Alf out of his cell and on the way to the Court yard, where stood some convenient trees. A short pause under one of these, a number of pistol shots, and in three minutes not a living man of that company was in sight — only a silent, ghastly figure suspended above the ground, from a limb of a tree east of the Court House.

Next morning the Court met at the usual hour. Quietly the lawyers and other officials took their seats, and the jurors in the Alf Holt case filed in, in charge of the sheriff.

Judge W. T. Owen was on the bench at the time, and I remember well his righteous indignation at the insult to the Court and the disgrace to the community. He was greatly moved and trembled visibly as he addressed the jury. I suppose that no record was made of what he said, but it included, I am sure, a terrible and deserved castigation of the unknown perpetrators of the dastardly crime. The following language I think will fairly though feebly represent the substance of his talk:

Gentlemen of the jury, you are discharged from this case. A most dastardly and flagrant crime has been committed, almost in the presence of the Court. A greater outrage upon the dignity of the Court and of the State could hardly be imagined. This unfortunate prisoner was in the custody of the Court; the charge against him was being tried before you; the evidence against him had been heard: and then, before an opportunity was given him to speak by himself or by counsel, he was taken by an armed mob and murdered. No earthly tribunal can now pronounce upon his guilt or innocence. I blush for shame that such a disgrace should have come upon this community.

The final entry on the order book reads in bald simplicity:

"The death of the defendant Alf Holt was this day suggested and this prosecution as far as said Holt is concerned is now abated."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 20 August 1995, pp.1F & 5F:

Mildred Lucas made history as state's first woman jailer

By Karen Owen, Messenger-Inquirer

Daviess County's first elected woman didn't originally plan to run for office. She just wanted to take care of her fatherless children.

Mildred Lucas, Kentucky's first woman jailer, managed to hold the position for only 16 months. Then an appeals court said she couldn't hold office because she couldn't vote.

Lucas made history after her jailer husband, a Confederate veteran, was killed by a lynch mob while protecting a black prisoner.

A painter by trade, W.J. Lucas was a "a poor but hard-working man of an eccentric and peculiar nature," according to newspaper accounts.

When he was killed, local residents sympathized with the widowed Mildred Lucas.

The July 13, 1884, slaying happened when a group of masked horsemen rode out of the night to surround the courthouse square.

They wanted one of W.J. Lucas' prisoners, Dick May, a black man accused of attempting to rape a farmer's daughter on July 4.

For days after May's arrest, Owensboro buzzed with rumors of mob violence, newspaper reports show. At one point, the county judge even appointed a guard to help W.J. Lucas at the jail.

Mildred Lucas and the children were invited to stay with friends, but "like the brave woman that she is," the local newspaper reported later, "she announced that she would stay with her husband until the last." When the lynch mob arrived, Lucas, "a man of highly irritable and nervous temperament," managed to squeeze off seven shots before he was wounded.

While Mildred Lucas tried to comfort him, the mob at first refused to let the Lucases' son, Tommy, fetch a doctor.

They battered in the jail door and dragged May to the courthouse yard, where they hung him from a tree.

Lucas died a few hours later.

The Messenger and Examiner reported the jailer "leaves a delicate wife and six children, but one of who is old enough to assist his mother."

Lucas was insolvent when he died, but did leave \$4,000 in life insurance. The newspaper suggested 1,000 county residents donate a \$1 each to help provide for the Lucas children.

The day after her husband's death, Mildred Lucas was appointed to fill her late husband's position until an election could be held in August. That made her the first woman jailer in Kentucky, according to local historian Aloma Dew.

But while the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote wouldn't be passed until 36 years later, at least 10 local attorneys, according to newspaper reports in 1884, announced they thought Lucas could legally hold office.

Others, including attorney C.H. Walker, disagreed.

In the July 30, 1884, Messenger and Examiner, he said the community should help Lucas through charity, not by discarding "the fundamental principles of the law itself."

The dispute caused "a great deal of embarrassment to several gentlemen," the newspaper reported, "who wish to run if she does not, but who will not run against her."

Mildred Lucas won the August election – by 313 votes, according to her obituary - and defeated nine opponents.

But Sam T. Duncan, one of her challengers, contested her victory.

As the dispute dragged on, the Messenger and Examiner reported in October, "This is a fight not so much of Duncan vs. Lucas as of the attorneys in the case, and the public is getting tired of it."

Lucas refused to vacate her office. She held on for 16 months until the state Court of Appeals ruled she wasn't eligible for the position.

In the ruling, according to Dew's research, one judge wrote that "being a citizen does not necessarily entitle one to the right of suffrage or the right to hold any Constitutional office."

Lucas was reimbursed for \$294 for feeding prisoners, but wasn't paid for other work she did as jailer.

Little else is known about the next 14 years of her life. According to her obituary, Lucas died of consumption in 1898 at the age of 55.

Twenty-two years later, in 1920, women finally won the right to vote, and to hold elective office. But there still hasn't been another woman jailer in Daviess County.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 12 July 2020, pp.1A & 2A:

Maglinger
wants former
Daviness jailer
remembered
Lucas died in 1884
while trying to
prevent lynching

By James Mayse, Messenger-Inquirer

Daviness County Jailer Art Magliner wants people to remember William J. Lucas.

The former Daviness County jailer was fatally shot by a mob on July 13, 1884, while Lucas tried to defend Richard "Dick" May, a Black jail inmate, from being lynched. Lucas' death and May's subsequent lynching made national news, with accounts being written by the New York Times and Chicago Tribune.

Maglinger, a Daviness County native who had a career in law enforcement before becoming jailer, said Lucas' story doesn't seem to be widely known.

"I don't talk to too many people in the public who would've known about it," Maglinger said, adding that he hopes to honor Lucas' actions by naming a building on the detention center campus after Lucas.

"I was proud of that history, that someone from the corrections industry died in the line of duty," Maglinger said. "He chose sacrifice over self."

Maglinger's brother, Woody Maglinger, discovered the story while researching lynchings in the region for his history dissertation at Western Kentucky University. Woody Maglinger later turned his dissertation into a book, "Dark Days in the Ohio Valley: Three Western Kentucky Lynchings, 1884-1911."

"There was a holocaust (of lynchings) that happened across the American South" between Reconstruction and World War I, Woody Maglinger said.

"As someone who grew up in Daviness County my whole life, I had never heard of it," Woody Maglinger said of Lucas' story. "This (story), at least to my knowledge, it's not talked about."

Lucas was a painter by trade who moved to Daviness County to raise his family, but Lucas' story starts earlier, in 1861. As a soldier in the Confederate army, Lucas was present on April 12, 1861, when Confederate forces fired on the Federal garrison at Ft. Sumter in Charleston Harbor, starting the Civil War.

In Daviness County, Lucas ran unsuccessfully for jailer in 1878, but was elected to the post in 1882. According to accounts Woody Maglinger found during his research, Lucas was "a very persistent and tough person."

"I think he had the warrior mentality," Woody Maglinger said. "... I imagine he had a really strong sense of justice. He was going to make sure he discharged his duties in a way that made his community proud."

The history of lynchings is filled with incidents where jailers or officials stood aside while a mob killed a Black man. It would have been easy for Lucas to do the same, given that he only had his family with him when the mob came for May.

May was a farm hand to the Kelly family, who lived east of Owensboro. May had worked for the family for seven years at the time he was arrested. Maglinger's paper describes May as being "trusted and respected" by the family.

On July 4, 1884, while most of the family were not in the house, the family's 17-year-old daughter claimed May had attempted to "outrage her person," Maglinger wrote. The girl later told her mother the family dog intervened and bit May, and he threatened to kill her if she told anyone before fleeing.

On July 6, Mrs. Kelly hid her husband's firearms and then told him about the alleged assault. May fled after being accosted but was captured later by an Owensboro police officer near the river bank, while Kelly and an armed posse searched elsewhere. May was in jail before others knew he had been arrested, the local newspaper, the Semi-Weekly Messenger, reported.

May, who was 23, later told those who arrested him he had propositioned the girl previously, and while she had never agreed to his advances, she had never rebuffed him outright. The newspaper, making no attempt at objectivity, called the incident a "bestly offense."

The Semi-Weekly Messenger ratcheted up tension in town with its depiction of the attempted assault, calling it "one of the most revolting offenses which, of late, are of such frequent occurrence all over the county — attempted rape." The paper began reporting rumors of a "mob" that planned to attack the jail. At one point, the paper reported it had sent a reporter out at 2 a.m. to find the mob and tell them to "hurry along, if it was coming, as the MESSENGER must go to press at 3 o'clock."

Extra guards were put in place by the county judge, and Lucas hid May at times, once in the courthouse and later on a roof. After several days of no activity, however, the judge dismissed the guards, leaving Lucas and his family to watch over the jail.

At 1:30 a.m. on July 13, a group of armed men, wearing masks, surrounded the jail and demanded Lucas turn over May. Some members of the mob fired into the air, and Lucas fired his shotgun, telling the mob, "I'll swear to God I'll never give him to you! I'll die first," Maglinger wrote.

After Lucas and his son exchanged gunfire with the mob for several minutes, Lucas was struck in the chest from a blast.

The mob was unable to get the keys to the actual jail at first from Lucas' wife, and eventually had to batter down the jail door. May was hanged from a tree on the courthouse lawn. Woody Maglinger said hanging May at the courthouse was to make the lynching "an official, community-sanctioned event.

"It gave some tacit approval from the community" to the lynching, he said. May's body was left hanging for some hours, with people coming by to look at his body.

Lucas died hours after being shot, and was buried at Elmwood Cemetery. In the days after the lynching, the white community began to fear reprisals by Black residents, and put armed men on just about every street corner. Of course, the rumored reprisals never materialized.

Given the period, May likely would not have received a fair trial had he lived until then, Woody Maglinger said.

"I know so many times, when a Black man was put on trial for some crime, it was rare he was ever found not at fault," Maglinger said. "... It's hard to believe he ever would have gotten a fair trial."

No one was ever punished for May's lynching, or even indicted for the crime, Woody Maglinger said.

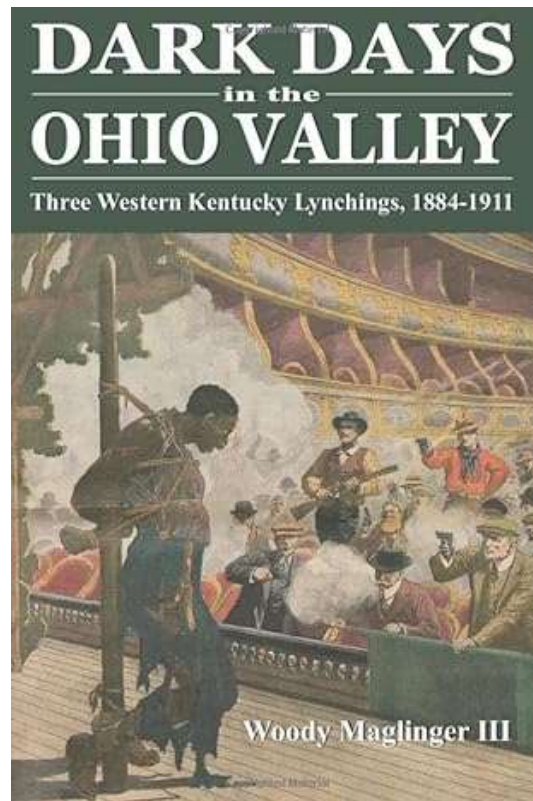
"It wasn't until 1911 that there was any attempt to indict the mob" for a lynching, although in that incident, in Livermore, none of the mob were found guilty, he said.

"Nobody was charged or convicted" in May's death, Art Maglinger said, "and the inmate was denied due process. Basically, he was murdered."

Art Maglinger said he plans to name the jail's training building after Lucas, and hopes to be able to do so during next year's Police Memorial ceremony in the county.

"I feel that sacrifice is worthy of that recognition," he said. Woody Maglinger said Lucas' history is "a cautionary tale (against) painting with a broad brush."

"Here we have William Lucas, a Confederate soldier and white jail official" in 1884, he said. "You wouldn't think (Lucas) would do what he ended up doing. ... He gave his life to carry out justice and make sure justice was done."



Woody W. Maglinger, III, compiled and published in 2004 a master thesis that included a detailed analysis of three lynchings 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, Bowling Green, KY. The author gives a comprehensive analysis of three lynchings – Dick May in 1884 in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY (pages 48-85); Raymond Bushrod in 1897 in Hawesville, Hancock County, KY (pages 86-114); and William Potter in 1911 in Livermore, McLean County, KY (pages 115-144).

The author introduces his thesis by writing:

This thesis investigates three lynchings of African Americans in Progressive-Era western Kentucky. The first occurred in Owensboro. In July 1884, a masked mob attacked the Daviess County jail. Richard May, an African-American field hand, had been incarcerated for the alleged sexual assault of a local farmer's daughter. During the lynch mob's actions that claimed May's life, the white county jailer was killed protecting his prisoner. Ironically, just two decades earlier Jailer William Lucas had fought for the Confederate States of America during the Civil War.

In nearby Hawesville in September 1897, Raymond Bushrod was also arrested on suspicion of raping a white girl. Rumors swirled throughout the town about a potential mob, with the local newspaper even commenting that "the result of [the community's outrage] will likely be the first lynching in the history of Hancock County before morning." Indeed Bushrod was hanged; however, the heinous act took place in daylight in the full view of cheering women and children.

The final case, the April 1911 Livermore (McLean County) lynching, received the widest national—and even international—attention. Residents of Livermore seized William Potter, a local black man arrested for allegedly assaulting a white man, from town law enforcement officials. The lynch mob then shot Potter to death on the stage of the town opera house. Some accounts state that admission was charged for the morbid spectacle. The horrific event was harshly condemned by the national and international press, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People petitioned both Frankfort and Washington, D.C. for action. Surprisingly, heavy public pressure resulted in the eventual indictment of eighteen prominent McLean Countians believed to have participated in the heinous spectacle. Not surprisingly, they were all hastily acquitted, however. Nonetheless, media attention of the disturbing tragedy helped to ensure that the days of unchecked lynch law in the American South were numbered.

These stories are brought to life through eyewitness accounts in contemporary newspaper reports and court records. In addition to presenting a case study of each lynching, I examine the public sentiment, media treatment, and legal proceedings (if any) surrounding these acts of racial violence. As an overarching theme, I analyze how society itself changed during the period under review, from 1884 to 1911.

Author notes other lynchings in Daviess County, KY:

[page 80] The Messenger notes that May's lynching was not the first act of mob violence in Daviess County. "This is the third man hanged by a mob in the court-house [sic] yard in the history of the county," explained the paper. "Another man was once hanged in another part of the county." ("A Bloody, Brutal Mob", Owensboro Semi-Weekly Messenger, p.4). May's lynching would not be the last time the courthouse tree was utilized for such a dark purpose. Just five years later, a local black barber, Dock Jones, was whisked from his jail cell and hanged from the same tree as May was. Alfred Holt, another Owensboro black, was hanged on courthouse square in 1896. Two white men, Felix Poole (1893) and Josh Anderson (1902) also met their demise at the hands of Owensboro lynch mobs. [ed. note by Jerry Long – Felix Poole's death by a mob in Ohio County, KY was falsely reported in the Owensboro Messenger, 3 August 1893 p.1 & 6 August 1893 p.1]

[Mr. Maglinger ends his chapter on the lynching of Dick May by concluding:

[pages 84-85] The 1884 lynching of Dick May was a twofold tragedy. Yet another African-American male was violently murdered without due process; and a dedicated law officer was killed in the process. Judge Little brought out a significant point in his grand jury instructions. He declared that “each and every person that joined in that bloody work,” even if it was simply by “understanding its purpose” or “aiding and encouraging it by their presence,” were “guilty of murder.” Little proved to be ahead of his time in understanding that it was broad-based community approval or acquiescence that allowed the phenomenon of lynching to continue.

This particular lynching was very different from most. A white county official died attempting to save a black life—and moreover to preserve the rule of law. So one would think that local citizens would be much more likely to punish mob participants in this case. Indeed there was much verbal outrage expressed about Jailer Lucas’ murder. However, in the end it did not translate into action. Area residents chose to blame the stereotypical “hands of persons unknown” for the killings, rather than to open their eyes to the heinous deeds of their neighbors.



Lynching of Doc / Dock Jones – 19 December 1889:

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 14 June 1887, p.4:

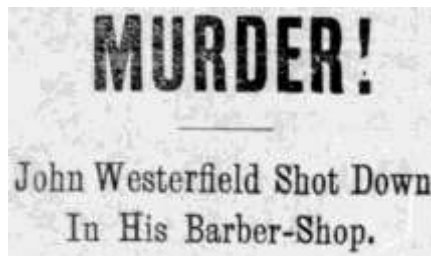
West Main Street Barber Shop.

Having refitted and refurnished my barber shop at Cal Thomas' old stand, East Main street, and employed an assistant in the person of Dock Jones, formerly with Cal Thomas, I invite the public to give me a call, assured that I can give excellent satisfaction. Shave sea-foam 15 cents.

J. F. Westerfield.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 19 December 1889, p.1:



Assassinated by Dock Jones, a Mean Negro Barber.
Westerfield Dies in Two Hours After Making a Clear Statement.
The Negro Arrested and Put in Jail,
But Taken out By a Mob and Hanged.
The Jailer Makes a Determined Resistance,
But Finally Gives up the Keys When Menaced by Pistols.

HANGED IN THE COURT-HOUSE YARD.

A great many of the citizens of Owensboro will awake this morning to learn from the Messenger that a cruel murder of an inoffensive man has been committed, that a loving wife is a widow, that five little children are orphaned, and that the primitive justice of Judge Lynch has been administered to the dastardly murderer.

John Westerfield, a barber, at 520 East Main street, was shot and killed in his shop last night by Dock Jones, colored, also a barber.

Jones had been drinking all the evening and about half-past 8 o'clock went to Westerfield's shop. Westerfield was shaving Mr. J. J. Hill and when Jones began to talk in his usual blustering style he requested him to get out of the shoo. Jones was standing near the door, and stepping one foot outside, began cursing Westerfield. The latter said to Jones "Dock, you are drunk, and I don't want to have anything to do with you; go away." At this Jones grew more abusive than ever. Westerfield then took a pistol from a drawer and going to the door again requested Jones to go away. He replied insultingly and Westerfield slapped him in the face.

Jones turned away and asked Westerfield what he meant by striking him. Westerfield again told him to go away and Jones left the shop and went up the street to his own place. Westerfield went back and finished shaving his customer, after which he sat down and chatted pleasantly with some boys who passed the door.

When the boys passed on Westerfield got up and prepared to shave himself. Jones returned in about twenty minutes after first leaving the shop. Westerfield was shaving William Mattingly and had gone over his face once with the razor and was lathering it the second time when Jones opened the door. He had the razor in one hand the brush in the other, and was standing by a brass-covered foot-stool about eight inches high.

As Jones opened the door he fired. The shot passed through Westerfield's left hand as he held the shaving brush up to his face. He turned his body slightly, with his left side still toward Jones, when the latter fired again. The bullet took effect at the base of the neck just in front of the point of the left shoulder, and passed out at exactly the same spot on the other side. The wounded man threw his hands above his head, when Jones fired a third shot, which went through the center of his right hand, and he fell.

When the first shot was fired Messrs. J. Q. Haynes, J. J. Hill and Ben Rosenthal ran to the shop. The latter seized Jones in ten seconds after he fired the last shot. He had the smoking pistol still in his hand. Rosenthal tried to get it away from him, but could not do so until Haynes seized Jones. Rosenthal then wrenched the pistol away from the negro and struck him in the face two or three times. They then, assisted by John Bratchey, started with him to jail. On their way they met Officer Handley, who took the prisoner in charge and put him in jail.

When Mr. Hill reached Westerfield he was lying in a pool of blood that had gushed from the wound. Drs. Rodman and McCormick were sent for and not many minutes elapsed before they were at the wounded man's side. They at once pronounced his injuries fatal, but went to work to do what they could for him. The blood was washed from his face and breast and he was carried to his home, which was only three doors away. His wife and five little children gathered at his bedside and their expressions of agonizing grief were touching in the extreme. Westerfield soon rallied under the influence of stimulants and was able to talk. He gave the account of Jones' work as above to a reporter. Later he made a dying statement to Esq. Adams, which corresponded exactly with his first story, except that he added that they had trouble before. The shooting occurred exactly 9 o'clock. By 10 o'clock there was a marked apparent improvement in his condition. Half an hour later he began to sink rapidly, and at 10:50 he died.

THE MURDERER'S STORY.

On his way to jail Jones wanted his guards to allow him to get some whisky. He said he had killed his man and would kill another one. His reason for shooting Westerfield, he said was that Westerfield knocked him out of the door and while he was down pointed the pistol at him. "But I shot first," the brutal scoundrel laughed, closing his statement with a frightful curse upon his dying victim.

The utter falsehood of this statement is apparent, both from Mr. Hill's testimony and from Westerfield's dying account, as well as from all the circumstances of the case. Jones had been, as he expressed it "on the war-path," all the evening, He went to T. S. Taylor's saloon with the avowed purpose of killing Taylor, swearing he would do so if he could find him. He showed his pistol at Taylor's, which makes certain that he had it at Westerfield's when he went there the first time, as he went from the saloon immediately to the barber shop, both being in the same square.

A reporter visited Jones in jail an hour after he had been locked up. He was already sound asleep on a cot and when aroused was, or pretended to be, too drunk to talk, and nothing what ever could be got out of him.

Jones is known as the worst character about town, and has been in all sorts of trouble. Westerfield was a hardworking man, inoffensive and amiable in his disposition. He was a good musician and added to his income by leading the local orchestra.

The cause of the trouble referred to by Westerfield dated from the Thanksgiving ball at the armory. Jones, with characteristic impudence, forced his way there and tried to force a difficulty on the Wagner boys and Westerfield. Since that time he had persecuted the latter until last night. When he came to the shop, Westerfield seemed to know his mission. "I know I will have to kill him," he said, before he was shot, and I got my pistol to do it, but when I got to him he whined and said 'John, you wouldn't hurt me.' and I put my pistol down and slapped him." After the shooting was over the pistol was found in the drawer where it had been put. It was a light 32 caliber Smith & Wesson. John Brachey has Jones' weapon, it is an old-style, single action 38 caliber Smith & Wesson.

An hour after Westerfield's death Esq. E. G. Adams summoned a jury and held an inquest. A verdict was returned to the effect that Westerfield was killed by Jones and that the killing was a willful murder. Esq. Adams then ordered Jones to be confined in jail without bail.

SPEEDY VENGEANCE.

The Murderer Taken Out of Jail and Hanged in the
Court-House Yard at 2:50 O'clock This Morning.

Soon after the death of Westerfield there came reports of a mob organizing up town, and soon there was an unusual animation on the streets for that time of night. Men could be seen slipping in and out of saloons with their coat collars turned up, hats slouched down over their faces and their hands rammed down suspiciously in their pockets. Every man found on the streets was satisfied that there

WOULD BE A MOB.

but he was going to have no hand in it. He proposed, however, to see the fun. Soon groups of twos and threes and fours were seen tramping down Main street toward the jail. They were not in a procession, but came leisurely along a half square apart, and under ordinary circumstances would have created no suspicion.

The rendezvous was in an up-stair back room of the old Southern Hotel, just across the street from the jail. Little groups of men drawn by curiosity stood on the opposite corners and

WATCHED THE LYNCHERS.

as they went up the stairs. A dim light burned in that back room, but it shed its rays on a determined set of men. They counseled together for a long time – so long were they at it that some of the watchers lost patience and went home believing there would be no mob. One who professed to know, however, said they had the rope, the leader was chosen and he was only giving his final instructions to his men while tee masks were being prepared. Occasionally a man or two would come down stair and go off up town, which strengthened the belief that the mob was weakening.

But finally the heavy

TRAMP OF MANY FOOT STEPS.

were heard coming along the hallway – the same hallway from which Bob McFarland fell to his death Sunday night – and tramp, tramp, tramp, they came down the stairway. These did not turn up the street. Their mission was in the other direction. They filed silently around the corner of the Southern Hotel into St. Elizabeth street, while chosen men stood guard at the two north corners of Main street. If a venturesome bystander would try to run the gauntlet and get over to the north side,

"STAND BACK!"

was the command, and this with the muzzle of a pistol thrust into the face of the intruder was sufficient argument, and he would retrace his steps without unnecessary delay. When the leader reached the gate to the jail yard, he turned and in a loud voice commanded: "Watch those corners! Let no man pass that you do not know is one of our men!"

"I know that voice!" whispered a half dozen of the bystanders in the shadow of Frey's livery stable, but some thought it was one man and some another.

Silently the mob entered the jail yard and when the iron gate clanged behind them everybody was satisfied the mob

MEANT BUSINESS.

There was at first only a gentle rap at the front door of the jailer's residence. It brought no response. There was a dim light in one of the upstairs bed rooms. It was instantly put out. Then there was a louder knock. Then the leader rattled the door and kicked on it viciously.

THEN CAME A VOICE.

"Boys! Boys !" called Jailer Lancaster from the window whence the light had so suddenly disappeared, "come round here and let me talk to you

"Well, what is it?" asked the leader gruffly. "

It's no use," rang out the jailer's voice on the still night air, "I've got five armed men in here and if you don't go away we'll have to fire into you."

"FIRE AWAY AND BE D-D !"

retorted the leader amid the jeers of the mob, and they renewed their attack on the heavy oaken front door.

Finding it would not yield, there was a brief parley, when the leader sent a man around the corner to the black smith shop next to Reidhaar's grocery for a sledge hammer. The blacksmith's door was broken open and the sledge procured, and with it the big front door was soon burst in.

GETTING INTERESTING.

About twelve resolute men entered the hall of the residence portion of the jail, two of them bearing heavy sledges, a third the rope, and all with pistols in their hands and closely masked. To break an inner door and get into the jail office was but the labor of an instant. Then the ponderous sledges began their work. The men took frequent turns and at intervals there would be intervals of rest, interspersed with curses, words of command and threats to blow up the jail. The work continued for thirty-five minutes. The hinges at last gave way almost entirely. But progress was

too slow. Daylight would overtake the mob before the two doors were destroyed. Something must be done.

SIX BIG FELLOWS.

marched up the stairway to Jailer Lancaster's apartment. He was talking in subdued tones to John Ashby, who was in the jail with the keys in his pocket. The six came into the room and demanded the keys. The jailer ordered them to disperse and refused. Five cocked pistols were thrust in his face and the other was fired at the ceiling. Another shot aroused the screams of the children and Mrs. Lancaster told the men they had done enough. They said the keys must come and shot again. Mrs. Lancaster called to John Ashby to open the doors. The six became enraged and gave Uncle Nick time to make up his mind. He said "Men, I've been all through the war and never was

A FEARED OF GUNPOWDER,

but I ain't like I was then. I can't stand pistols that close to me."

At last Mrs. Lancaster, frightened for herself and children, called below to the two deputies who were inside with the keys to

OPEN THE DOORS.

and let the mob have the murderer.

Deputy Jailer Ashby had heard and heeded Mrs. Lancaster's command, when Uncle Nick said "John, I reckon you'll have to let 'em have 'em, but they oughtn't to come here this way." George Blandford was in the jail with Ashby. They were loth searched and two men held Blandford. Ashby was hustled up the stairs between two more stout fellows. The great mob-proof doors swung back on their hinges and

A YELL OF TRIUMPH.

arose when the men got into the corridor of the cage. Ashby guided them to Jones' cell and opened the door. There were three other petty larceny negroes in the cell. Jones had never been awake, and had not heard of all the noise that had been made. To find him in the darkness was the work of an instant, the other three occupants being perfectly willing that no mistake should be made. Jones was dragged out of his cot, which was an upper one, by the heels. He was too drunk and sleepy to stand. The halter had been prepared and was

DROPPED OVER HIS NECK.

To prevent any outcry it was drawn taut, and with another yell of rage and triumph, a mad rush was made for the open air. In the hall a cry of

"TO THE COURT-HOUSE!"

was raised, and when the mob Reached the front of the house it was howling and snarling with delight.

Once in the street a dozen pistol shots were quickly fired by the mob to scare away the bystanders. By this time the south side of Main street from the Deposit Bank to Frey's corner, and even down the next square was literally packed with people. There was a

MAD STAMPEDE.

among them. But the mob did not come up to Main street with the victim. They went down by Frayser's factory and through the alley by the old gas works to Frederica street, yelling and hooting and firing pistols, and passed up the west side of Frederica. As they went by Louis Carter's saloon the poor devil could be distinctly seen in the glare of the electric light. One man was in front leading him by the rope, while one at either side dragged him along by the arms. His footsteps were anything but willing. The chief men in the mob were masked, but many of the others were not. There were not more than forty in the outset, and from time to time the weak-kneed fellows dropped out. At the final execution there were

NOT EXCEEDING FIFTEEN

to participate.

As the mob entered the north gate of the court-house, the guards again warned the followers to stand back and fired several shots as a menace. But a reporter of the Messenger anticipating this, had sped along in front of the mob and, secured an excellent point of vantage behind the east door of the court-house at the side which he felt sure the negro would be hanged. In this he was mistaken. The mob selected the same tree from which the last negro lynched in this county was hanged – the one in whose defense Jailer Lucas lost his life in August, 1885 – not exceeding twenty steps from the door. With the mob and their victim between him and the electric lights shining from the stores on St. Ann street, the Messenger's man could see the whole proceeding and can testify that it was

WELL DONE.

Arriving at the tree the man carrying the end of the rope climbed up into it. "Not around that limb," ordered the leader. "This one," he added. It was the same one selected by the Lucas mob. The negro uttered no cry or appeal. He made one or two gasps before he was drawn up as if the rope was already choking him but could not utter a word. He was lifted up and the rope made fast to the limb. Then

HIS BODY WAS DROPPED.

Somebody said; "Jump on his shoulders." Another protested, "Oh, don't !" Whether or not this was done could not be seen in the confusion of the moment. The crowd stood around silently for several minutes waiting the miserable wretch surely dead. Finally one stepped up and felt of his heart. "Is he dead yet," somebody inquired. "No, not yet," was the reply. In another moment he

WAS PRONOUNCED DEAD.

"Three cheers for this night's good work!" exclaimed the leader, and his followers gave them heartily. Then a half dozen pistol shots were fired in the air and the mob quickly dispersed, The crowd on the outside of the court-house yard then rapidly filed in and viewed the ghastly scene.

The body was left banging, It was still hanging at 4:30 this morning when a reporter of the Messenger again visited it to see if any of the pistol balls had been fired into it. None had. The body hangs within two feet of the ground. The chin is sunk deep upon the breast of the victim. The

FEATURES ARE HORRIBLY DISTORTED.

The body will be cut down after day light, when Esq. Adams will hold the coroner's inquest. Westerfield was shot at 9 P. M.

He died at 10:43 P. M.

The mob attacked the jail at 1:50 A. M.

The prisoner was secured at 2:35 A. M.

At 2:50 he was hanging by the neck dead.

Speedy justice, indeed.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 22 December 1889, p.4:

Dock Jones, the negro hanged by a mob in Owensboro last week, seems to have lived at a number of places before settling in Owensboro. The papers of Hawesville, Cloverport and Bowling Green claim him as an old resident. He was, in fact, originally from Simpson county.



Doctor Jones (c1859-1889)

By Jerry Long

Doctor Jones, who was known by the nicknames of “Doc” and “Dock”, was born about 1859 in Kentucky. He almost certainly was born a slave. He appears in the 1870 census of Simpson County, KY (p.16A, post office – Franklin). His household was recorded as:

dwelling # 97-97 Jones, Harriett – female – black – keeping house –born Kentucky
“ , Doctor – male – black – born Kentucky

Harriett was probably Doctor’s mother. Harriet Jones, black, age 40, born KY, is listed as a resident of Franklin in the 1880 census of Simpson County, KY. Her occupation was listed as washing & ironing. In her home was one other person – a male with the last name of Jones, who was reported to be age 22, born KY, working as a wagoner. This census report is badly faded and his given name could not be deciphered.

In the years immediately preceding his death Doctor Jones several times ran afoul of the law. On several occasions in Cloverport and Owensboro, KY he was fined for disturbing the peace and brawling. He resided for a time in Cloverport, Breckinridge County, KY. In July 1883 Dock Jones was a resident there. The newspaper, Breckenridge News, of 1 August 1883 (p.3) reported that

“A little two year old step-son of Doc Jones, the barber, while playing on the platform in front of his shop, Sunday afternoon, fell off and broke his left leg just above the knee. The platform is thirty feet from the ground.”

The Breckenridge News carried the following notice in its edition of 9 January 1884 (p.3):

“Charlie Furrow and “Doc” Jones, our tonsorial artists, have consolidated their shops, and opened up in the Boyd block next door to F. DeHaven’s.”

Upon the death of Jones the Breckenridge News in its issue of 25 December 1889 (p.6) reported that Dock Jones was the same negro who had ran a barber shop in Cloverport two or three years ago. During January 1884 and September 1885 Dock Jones located in Owensboro. He was fined \$5 for disorderly conduct in the Owensboro police court on 24 September 1885 (Owensboro Messenger, 24 September 1885, p.4). In Owensboro Doctor Jones met death by lynching on 19 December 1889.



Lynching of Alfred Alexander, alias Alfred Holt – 26 December 1896:

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 5 November 1896, pp.1 & 5:

FOULLY MURDERED.
—
**Officer White Held By Negro
Ruffians and Brutally
Shot to Death.**

Attempting to Quiet the Noisy Gang
They Turn Upon and Disarm Him.
The Dastardly Deed Arouses Intense Excitement
and There Was Strong Talk of a Lynching Bee.
THREE OF THE VILLAINS CAUGHT.

Officer Aquilla White, a good and efficient officer, lost his life, was brutally murdered yesterday, by a gang of worthless negroes while he was in the strict discharge of his duty as a policeman.

The tragedy occurred immediately in front of John Walt's saloon, on Lower Fifth street, opposite the Southern iron works. Early during the day the negroes, among them Alf Holt, alias Alexander, George Baskett, Herman Baskett and Ben Allison, were making a great deal of noise, cursing, yelling and swearing, greatly to the annoyance of the denizens of that locality. The section is embraced in what was then Officer White's beat. He did not interfere at first with the negroes. Recognizing that they were naturally hilarious over the result of the election, he allowed them more scope than he otherwise might have done. Keeping up the noise, however, Officer White, before approaching them, sought out Chief of Police Crook and laying the case before the chief, asked for instructions in the premises.

Chief Crook advised White to return to his beat and if the negroes still persisted in their disturbance, to go to them in a mild way and ask them to desist. This Officer White said he would do. He returned to the scene of the noise, which was still being indulged in by the negroes, though what was said by him to them, of course, can never be known. It is known, however, that soon after his return the negro George Baskett, a strapping giant, was seen to grasp Officer White from the rear, pinioning his arms and held him fast while the negro Alf Holt was seen to take the officer's pistol from his belt and stepping back fire two discharges into the right breast of the officer, killing him almost instantly. White never spoke after the firing.

Before the firing and while White and the Baskett negro were scuffling, Deputy City Marshal Lewis Wahl, chancing to be passing, rushed to the assistance of White. He grabbed the Holt negro, but at the same time the negroes Herman Baskett and Ben Allison grabbed Wahl, and in the struggle Wahl received a lick on the head which caused him to release his hold on Holt, and then it was the shots were fired and White fell a corpse.

The negroes then fled in different directions. Subsequently the two Basketts and Allison were arrested near the city and confined in jail. Holt went to his home, remained a few minutes and then escaped down the track of the Texas railroad.

The entire police force were put in quick pursuit and search was made all over the western portion of the county. Numerous reports during the afternoon to effect that Holt had been captured were circulated at different points, all of them proving false, and the negro at a late hour was still at large and posses were scouring the country in search.

The murder of Officer White caused intense excitement and lynching was and is strongly talked. So strongly was it believed that the negroes would be summarily dealt with that Circuit Judge Owen appointed Mr. James Bozarth to guard the jail last night and to summons twenty-five men to assist him. Should the negro Holt be captured, it is not believed that he will ever reach the jail alive.

Officer White was the youngest man on the force, being only twenty-four years of age. He was to have been married in a few weeks to Miss Nurzella Harper, of this city. White was appointed on the force last January, and was a fearless, brave officer and had already become a terror to evil doers. He was a handsome, genial and companionable citizen generally.

The negro Holt, his murderer, is counted a dangerous, mean negro. Last winter sometime White was called on to arrest Holt and in effecting the arrest had to bring his club into requisition and rapped Holt over the head before he would submit. This so enraged the negro that he swore after he was released that if Officer White attempted ever to lay hands on him again he would kill him, and the negro, unfortunately, has kept his word.

At the inquest Louis May, white, testified as follows: "I was over at the foundry; was standing in the foundry door. I saw a large crowd in front of Phillips' saloon on the side walk. Saw Mr. White telling them to clear the side walk, and they did so. White walked away towards Grausz's grocery when they blocked the side walk again, yelling and shouting at White. White came back and told them again to disperse, when the yelled at him. I saw two negroes grab him around the waist and take his billet away from him. Saw a negro hand Holt a pistol. White turned around when Holt fired two shots. White fell and died instantly, when the negroes ran away."

Julia King was sworn and corroborated May's statements.

The Jury returned the following verdict:

We, the jury summoned by George M. Hayden, coroner of Daviess county, to hold an inquest over the body of A. W. White, deceased, find from the evidence that the deceased came to his death by a pistol shot being fired by one Alf Holt, alias Alexander, and assisted, aided and abeted by George Basket, Herman Basket and Ben Allison, and we further find that the said killing was done with malice afore-thought and not in self-defense.

G. W. GATES. Foreman.
FRANK KATTERJOHN,
E. S. FOOTE,
P. T. LACKLJN,
T. G. GATES,
T. C. GUTHRIE.

The funeral of the dead officer will take place this morning from the First Baptist church, the Rev. Dr. Morrill preaching the sermon. The remains will then be conveyed to Bethabra burying ground for interment. Mr. White's sister, who resides in Texas, was dispatched for and it was the intention to hold the remains until her arrival, but answering that she could not come, arrangements were made as above.

The dead officer was a member, in good standing of the I. O. O. F. of this city and will be buried with lodge ceremonies. He was also a member of the Junior Order U. A. M., and with this order carried insurance to the amount of \$250.

The death of White has cast a gloom over the city and the unwonted outrage is one that is sure to have full investigation and proper punishment meted out by the court.

All yesterday crowds of men could be seen standing about here and there on the street corners discussing the awful tragedy, and it was the general belief that those under arrest would be lynched before morning.

It was reported in the afternoon that City Marshal Wethington and Deputy Jailer Ashby had arrested Holt at Stanley, and Commonwealth's Attorney Rowe and some of the county officers procured the steam yacht Messenger and went down the river to bring Holt to the city. But the report proved to be false. Had it been true, the officers would never have been able to get to the jail with their prisoner.

While the crime is a heinous one and deserves the severest punishment, the good people of the city hope that the law may be allowed to take its course, and the punishment legally meted out.

DIDN'T MATERIALIZE.

Evidences of a Gathering Mob Last Night But It Failed to Show Up.

Owensboro assumed something of a marshal law aspect last night, especially in the vicinity of the county jail. At each corner of the square on which the jail is located were stationed pickets armed cap-a-pie and in readiness to receive the mob which had been reported as formed to march down upon the prison to secure the negroes George and Herman Baskett and Ben Allison, implicated in the murder of Officer White for the purpose of hanging them.

At the jail Captain Jim Bozarth in command of the guard, consisting of twenty-five men allotted him by Judge Owen of the circuit court and about twenty-five others, volunteer guards, were on duty and were ready for any emergency that might arise.

About fifteen men from Whitesville came in on the I. C. train when it arrived at 9:20 p. m., all armed. They marched from the depot on foot, but if they came for any fixed purpose, up to midnight had made no demonstration.

Groups of men and boys were to be seen about the street corners within a square away from the jail until a very late hour, but they were more to witness whatever demonstration might be made than to be parties to the mob. Everybody residing in the neighborhood of the jail seemed on the quivive, Micawber-like, waiting for something to turn up, but which failed to turn. If really there was an attack premeditated, whether deterred by the knowledge of the strong guard in and around the prison, or otherwise, it failed to materialize and at the hour of going to press there had been no disturbance whatever, save about 1 o'clock a party of semi-drunken men about the Turf saloon fired several volleys, causing considerable excitement, but making no attempt on the jail.

There was an incident in connection with the killing yesterday in which an innocent negro was frightened out of several years growth: Chief Crook arrested on suspicion a negro, brother of the Basketts, but who was in nowise connected with the tragedy, nor had he been about the premises until after the murder. Chief Crook turned this negro over to Fire-chief Yager, who started in his buggy with him to the city lock-up. but Yager's buggy was intercepted by some of the crowd that had congregated, the negro pulled from the vehicle and only the prompt interference of Chief Crook and others prevented the negro being killed. As it was. he was handled pretty roughly by the men. The negro was finally gotten to the lock-up and after being kept for awhile was released, there being nothing to show that he was in anywise connected with the tragedy.

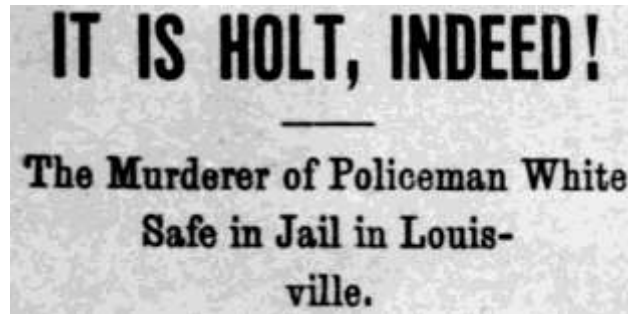


Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 10 November 1896, p.8:

Pictures of the negro, Holt, murderer of Officer White, are being made from a picture taken while the negro worked for the Harrison Telephone company. They will be distributed to aid the identification of the negro. The reward for Holt has been increased to \$250.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 21 November 1896, p.1:



He Confesses His Identity and
Tells the Part He Played In the Murder.
Arrived in Louisville Last Tuesday, Pawned the Policeman's
Pistol and Was Caught Friday by Detectives.
WILL NOT BE BROUGHT BACK YET.

Mayor J. H. Hickman received a dispatch yesterday from Jacob H. Haager chief of detective, Louisville, stating that Holt, alias Alexander, the negro who murdered Officer A. W. White, had been arrested in that city, and asking what disposition to make of him.

Mayor Hickman immediately wired the officer to hold the negro until he could send an officer to identify and take Holt in charge, and then instructed City Marshal Wethington to proceed to Louisville for that purpose. Before the departure of the train for Louisville another dispatch was received stating that Holt had confessed his identity and was pleading not to be returned to Owensboro.

The matter of the arrest of Holt was laid before County Judge Karn who caused the following order to be made on the record book of his court and a copy thereof furnished Marshal Wethington:

"It appearing to the court that one Alf Holt, alias Alf Alexander, is now in custody in Louisville on the charge of murdering Policeman A. W. White in the city of Owensboro, on the 4th day of November, 1896, having been just arrested on said charge; and it appearing to the satisfaction of the court that it would be unsafe to bring Holt here for confinement in the county jail of this county, or for examining trial, and that there is great danger of Holt's being rescued from jail and from custody by violence should he be brought here either for confinement or examining trial, it is ordered that Holt be committed to the jail of Jefferson county for safe keeping, to await the order of the county judge of Daviess county, or of the Daviess circuit court, or until he shall have been discharged according to law. The confinement of Holt, in the Jefferson county jail and the retention of him by the jailer of that county to be at the expense of the state of Kentucky, and in no event at the expense of this county."

Marshal Wethington, with Mr. Lester, an employe of the Harrison Telephone company under whom Holt had worked, left for Louisville at 4 p m. and at 10 o'clock last night Mayor Hickman received a telegram from the marshal, as follows:

Louisville, Ky., Nov. 21, 1896.

J. H. Hickman: Have the right man; got White's pistol in pawnshop.

R. O. WETHINGTON.

Holt Confesses.

The Louisville Times gives the following account of the arrest and confession of Holt: "

Through the efforts of Chief Detective Haager and Detectives Maher and Sexton the murderer of Policeman White, who was shot down at Owensboro on the night of November 4, has been apprehended. White was sent to quell a disturbance. He was compelled to draw his pistol, and as he did so one of the negroes snatched it from his hand and shot twice, one of the balls penetrating the heart. His assailant escaped and, it was thought, came to this city.

"Maher and Sexton arrested Alf Alexander in Shippingport, just as he was going to work on a rock pile this morning. He was known as John Jones and also as Holt.

"At first the negro denied all knowledge of the crime, and said that he had never been to Owensboro, but finally confessed to the murder and told Capt. Haager where the dead policeman's pistol could be found. When the detectives brought the weapon in from a second hand store he said: "That's the pistol, an' I'm the man what killed 'im."

"The negro appears to be about thirty five years old. He is as black as coal.

The detectives in the case will share among them a reward of \$450.

"Before confessing the crime Alexander made Capt. Haager promise not to take him back to Owensboro immediately if he told what he knew. He said that he was afraid the people would mob him. If it is in the power of Capt. Haager he will keep his promise. Excitement has been very high at Owensboro since the murder and serious consequences might ensue to Alexander in case he is taken there just now."

"The Evening Post says:

"The first clew was obtained yesterday afternoon when Major Haager was walking out Fourth street. He was approached by a negro man who said he had seen Alexander in Shippingport the day before. Then the detectives went to work on the case, and this morning they found that Alexander had just gone to work in the stone quarry across the canal. Detectives Sexton and Maher went down and arrested him. The man evinced no surprise, and even went so far as to tell them where he had pawned the pistol with which the bloody deed had been committed. The officers went to the pawnshop and found the weapon there, as the man said. When they had taken him to the photographer's and had his portrait made for the rogues' gallery they presented him in court and Judge Thompson made the order for him to be turned over to the Daviess county officials.

Holt Makes a Clumsy Denial.

"To a reporter for the Evening Post Alexander said he did not kill the officer and had no hand in it. He said he was standing by when the fight with the Basketts occurred. The officer had a pistol out and during the scuffle it was exploded and killed him. The weapon, he said, dropped on the ground and a white man told Alexander to pick it up and run. Before he thought, he said, he did so, and since then he has been in hiding. When asked if he feared he would be lynched if taken back to Owensboro he said he was sure that nothing would be done to him if he was given an opportunity to explain and summon his witnesses to prove what he said. There was only a bare chance, he thought, of his being hanged, and he said he was willing to take it. Major Haager has

notified the Daviess county officers, and they will probably reach here this evening. Then it will be decided upon whether or not it would be safe to take him back to Owensboro."

A Talk With Marshal Wethington.

Marshal Wethington at midnight talked with the Messenger over the telephone from Louisville. He said:

"When Mr. Lester and I arrived, we went immediately to the jail and as soon as we were taken into Holt's presence he recognized us, calling us both by name, but the jailer wouldn't allow us to talk to him much. He acted very peculiarly. He said the man ought to be stood up in line with others and we ought to pick him out. I told him this was ridiculous; that it wasn't necessary, as he had already identified himself by recognizing us and calling us by name as soon as we came in. But this didn't make any difference with the jailer. He said he thought the negro ought to have a fair show and would let us have but little conversation with him.

"If you didn't know Holt very well, you would hardly recognize him. He looks haggard and thin and is terrible depressed. He seems to know it is about all over with him. He says he escaped from Owensboro along the line of the Texas railroad not directly on the line, but by following its course and made his way toward Louisville. It is probably true he was seen in Holt's bottom, as he passed through there, but he was never below Owensboro and never crossed the river. Last Saturday he was at Sample, a station on the "Texas" road in Breckenridge county. He has been lying out and working his way up the river slowly. He reached Louisville Tuesday morning and laid low until when he went to work on a rock pile near Shippingport, and in a few minutes was arrested."

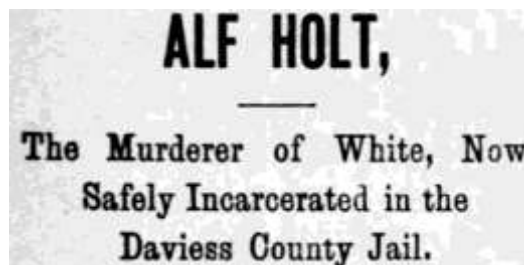
Mr. Wethington said he would leave Holt in the Louisville jail according to Judge Karn's instructions, and return to Owensboro on the morning train. He will bring with him Officer White's pistol, with which Holt shot him. He had pawned the pistol; that led to his arrest. The detectives who arrested Holt will come to Owensboro with Marshal Wethington to lay claim to the \$450 reward offered for the negro's arrest.

What Will Be Done With Holt?

There is a good deal of speculation as to how the prosecution against Holt can be proceeded with unless the man is brought to Owensboro and arraigned for his crime. Some of the lawyers say an application for a change of venue can be made without the presence of the prisoner. But this prisoner has no attorney so far as known, and without he comes before the court and says he has no attorney and is unable to employ one, proceedings for change of venue will be slow. Holt is very comfortable in the Louisville jail and will probably not be in a hurry to make the first move at long range in his case. The other men, charged with being accomplices in the murder of White, are still in the Princeton jail.

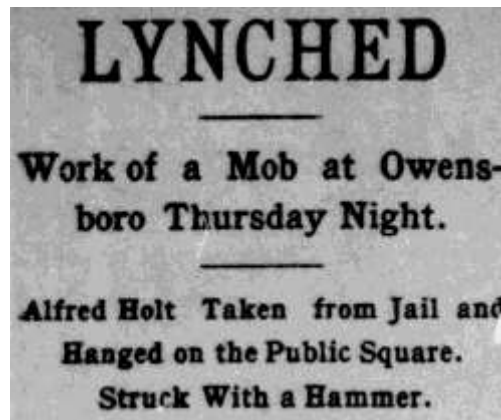


Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 27 November 1896, p.1:





Lexington Herald, Lexington, KY, Sunday, 27 December 1896, p.2:



Owensboro Dec. 26. — At 2:30 o'clock this morning Alfred Holt the negro charged with the killing of Policeman Aquilla White, was taken from the jail by a handful of men and hanged to a tree on the Court Square sidewalk, not fifty feet from the main entrance to the Rudd House.

The lynching party organized at a point on a aide street near the jail and pickets were stationed to guard against interruption Two or three men went to the jail office and aroused Deputy Jailer John Ashby They forced an entrance, secured the keys and took Holt from the cell where he was confined.

Holt begged for mercy and screamed piteously and it is said that to still his cries one of the men struck him with a hammer. He was bound and quickly taken to a sycamore tree and strong up.

Only eighteen men were in the lynching party at the tree A small crowd witnessed the hanging from the Rudd House steps.

No shots were fired and there was no disorder, and so quietly was the work done that few were aware of it until all was over.

There were seven negroes in jail charged with murder and it was reported yesterday that a mob would lynch the whole number in the jail at 11 o'clock last night. If the mob had been larger the whole seven would have been hanged.

Holt was being tried for his crime and the Commonwealth closed its testimony Thursday. The jury was discharged this morning. Commonwealth's Attorney J. E. Rowe is preparing now a statement for the press and says he will make every effort to ferret out the case and prosecute every member of the mob to the bitter end. Holt was being tried speedily and it is regarded as a certainty that he would have received the death penalty. Public sentiment here bitterly condemns last night's action as it was wanton, brutal and lawless, in view of the fact that Holt would have been surely hanged legally.

The body was cut down at 7 o'clock this morning and the coroner's jury returned a verdict in accordance with the facts stated. Examination showed a wound on the top of Holt's skull and a knife cut between the eyes.

In his statement given to the press this afternoon Commonwealth's Attorney Rowe says Holt's lynching was an outrage, a dastardly, cowardly murder, and every mother's son of those participating guilty of murder, with not even a mitigating or palliating circumstance. He reviews his efforts to secure a prompt trial and conviction. He says he has telegraphed Gov. Bradley to offer a reward for the lynchers, White, the father of Policeman White, says he wanted the law to take its course, and Holt hanged by a legal verdict, to avenge his son's death, and not by a mob.

There is very little open expression today from the negroes. They believed Holt guilty but are of course excited over the hanging. Threats by negroes may be heard, but it does not seem probable that any race trouble will result.

The crime for which Holt was being tried was the murder of Policeman White November 14. The officer attempted to disperse a crowd of boisterous negroes who were in front of John Walt's saloon yelling for McKinley. The negroes crowded in on the officer and one of them named George Basket snatched the officer's pistol and handed it to Holt, who fired two bullets into the policeman's body

The real name of the negro lynched at Owensboro last night was Alfred Alexander. He was known as Holt also, but this was a nickname given him because he was raised in what is known as Holt's bottom a section country in Breckinridge county. He was arrested in this city November 20 by Detectives Maher and Sexton in Shippingsport. He was found working on a rock pile. He was taken to Owensboro three weeks ago. They left the train with their prisoner two miles from town to avoid a mob supposed to be waiting. A carriage had been sent by the Chief of Police and they drove into town. The electric lights had been turned out by order of the Mayor. The mob at the jail had adjourned to another portion of the city before the prisoner's arrival at the bastille. Maher and Sexton received from the State and city of Owensboro rewards aggregating \$450 for arresting Alexander.

Circuit Judge Owens, in discharging the Holt jury this morning said that last night's lynching was the most flagrant outrage ever perpetrated on any court or on the law. He reviewed the history of the trial and said the pledges made that Holt would be given a trial if brought back here had been ruthlessly violated. He said the grand Jury would be instructed to make the fullest investigation possible at once. He adjourned court until Monday to decide whether to try other

murderers or make order necessary in the premises. Judge Owens' remarks were emphatic, indicating his deep feeling over the contempt shown his court.



Alfred Alexander
alias Alfred Holt
(c1871-1896)

By Jerry Long

The birth name of Alfred Holt, who was a victim of lynching in 1896, was Alfred Alexander. He was born about 1872 in Kentucky. He formerly had resided in the Holt's Bottom area of the northern section of Breckinridge County, KY. The area had been named for Judge Joseph Holt (1807-1894), who was the judge during the trial of conspirators in the Lincoln assassination.

Alfred Alexander was listed with his family in the 1880 census of the town of Hardinsburg in Breckinridge County, KY (p.7A, dwelling #118):

Alexander, Paul	Black	40	married	works on farmer	KY-KY-KY
“ Susan	Black	37	wife	keeping house	KY-VA-VA
“ Jennie	Black	17	daughter		KY-KY-KY
“ Alfred	Black	8	son		KY-KY-KY
“ George	Black	5	son		KY-KY-KY
“ Ida	Black	4	daughter		KY-KY-KY
Robards, Jane	Black	63	mother-in-law		VA-VA-VA

Jane Robards, (Black age 50) was listed with Bob Robards (Black, age 60, works on farm, born KY) in the 1870 census of town of Hardinsburg, Breckinridge County, KY (p.108B, dwelling #84-81). Paul & Susan Alexander could not be located in the 1870 census. They do appear in the 1900 and 1910 censuses of Hardinsburg, Breckinridge County, KY (1900 – p.182B, dwelling #128-128; 1910 – p.17A, dwelling #54-55). Their home appeared as:

1900: Alexander, Paul	Black	born Aug 1844 KY, married 27 years, farm laborer, rents
“ Susan	Black	born Jan 1843 KY, wife, 10 children 3 living
“ Wayman	Black	born Nov 1880 KY, son, single
“ Winchester	Black	born Feb 1885 KY, son, single
1910: Alexander, Paul	Black	age 65, born KY, married once 35 years, laborer odd jobs
“ Susan	Black	age 60, born KY, wife, married once 35 years

The death certificate of Susan Alexander records that she died at Hardinsburg, KY on 6 July 1914; born 23 January 1843 KY; daughter of Wyatt & Chassi Haynes; she was buried in the Hardinsburg Colored Cemetery. The death certificate of Paul Alexander shows that he died on 23 October 1932 in Breckinridge County, KY, where he was buried in the Hardinsburg Colored Cemetery. He was reported to have been born in 1847 to Ed & Mary Holt.

The Kentucky Vital Statistics of 1874-1878 record that a daughter was born on 9 November 1876 in Breckinridge County to Paul Holt & Susan (could not decipher last name); the child's

parents were born in Breckinridge County, KY. A marriage license of Winchester Alexander lists his parents as Paul Alexander & Susan Haynes. The US Social Security Application of Wayman Alexander records his parents as Paul Alexander & Susan Holt.

Alfred Alexander siblings included: Virginia (c1863-after 1889), 'Jennie', wife of David Robards; George (1875-1958), Ida (c1876-after 1880), Wayman (1880-1943); and Winchester (1885-after 1942).

Alfred "Alexander", alias Alfred Holt, married Emma Nall in Daviess County, KY on 17 February 1896 (Negro marriage book H, p.77). Alfred Holt died at the end of a rope in Owensboro on 26 December 1896. Mrs. Emma Alexander, age 30 and widowed, was living at 732 Lewis Street in Owensboro at the time of the 1900 census. She was reported to have one living child – Miss Lena Johnson, age 14. Emma had several subsequent marriages – Mrs. Emma Holt married Wallace Hardin (1867-1913) in 1906 in Owensboro; Emma as "Emma Glover" married Ernest Crowder in 1913 in Owensboro; and Mrs. Emma Hardin married Charles Wright in 1915 in Owensboro. An obituary for "Emma Wright" was published in the Owensboro Messenger of 16 October 1938 (p.10A). She was survived by one child, Lena Smith. Emma's death certificate was recorded under the name of "Emma Alexander." Her daughter, Lena Smith, was the informant for the record – she said her mother's maiden name was Glover, was born 11 August 1871 in Muhlenberg County, KY, died on 13 October 1938 in Owensboro, where she was buried in Greenwood Cemetery.



Lynching of Josh Anderson – 17 July 1902:

Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 15 March 1899, p.1:

SHOT HIMSELF.

Josh Anderson Runs Amuck at Alonzo Gilmore's Near Knottsville.
Drives a Family Away From Home and Then Puts a Bullet in His Breast.

Josh Anderson who lives near Knottsville, will not live there or anywhere else very long. He has a bullet hole in his breast one inch below the left nipple and three inches from the breast bone.

Monday Anderson was at Knottsville, drinking the peculiar brand of liquor they sell there, and he became wild. Some time after dark he went to the house of his brother-in-law Alonzo Gilmore, and drove the whole family off threatening to kill them if they came back that night. Tuesday morning about 8 o'clock they went home and found Anderson almost dead. He had torn up everything in the house, taken off all his clothes and after opening all the doors. shot himself.

Dr. Lockhart was summoned and found him almost dead. He administered restoratives and he revived somewhat from his half frozen unconscious state. He had lost a great deal of blood and was very weak. He was still alive this morning, but Dr. Lockhart said it was almost impossible for him to recover.

Anderson came here from Pittsburg about three months ago, and since that time has spent his time with relatives near Knottsville. He is a hard drinker and when under the influence of liquor gets wild.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 23 May 1902, p.1:

Circuit Court: Mollie Anderson sues her husband, Joshua Anderson, for a divorce. The parties were married in June, 1900, and separated on May 18, of the present year. She alleges cruel and inhuman treatment and calls upon the court to protect her, alleging that the defendant has threatened her life, and she believes he will yet do her bodily harm during the pendency of this case.



Owensboro Messenger. Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 9 July 1902, p.1:



SHE SCREAMED AND BEGGED FOR HER INNOCENT LIFE IN VAIN.
Fiend Incarnate After Shooting the Woman Took Her in the House.
MOTHER AND FATHER OF MURDERED WOMAN FLED FOR THEIR LIVES.
Anderson Came to Town, Gave Himself Up and Was Placed in Jail.
THE NEIGHBORHOOD IS AROUSED

Josh Anderson shot and killed his wife last night about 11 o'clock on the Whitely farm, three miles from town on the Henderson road. Three shots were fired, one taking effect behind the right ear, one in the breast and one in the arm. The cause of the killing was that she would not live with him.

Anderson came to the house just after the family had retired, kicked in the door, entered the house and demanded to see his wife. There were six persons in the house at the time, all of whom fled except the girl's mother, Mrs. Stevens, who hid in a closet. Just how the killing occurred nobody except the murderer himself knows. The woman, who was sleeping upstairs, came down and out into the yard where her husband was. He must have shot her immediately after she came down, as her mother did not have time to leave the house before the shots were fired.

After shooting her the man carried her into the house and placed her on the bed. speaking to her as he did so and telling her that he was going to kill himself. He then left the house.

News Reaches City.

The news was brought to town by some one passing along the road. When a reporter for the Messenger arrived on the scene, some two hours after the shooting, the house was completely deserted. In the hallway were evidences of rough work, the lock bursted off the door and the furniture overturned. In an adjoining room, dimly lighted by a kerosene lamp, lay the murdered woman, just as she had expired, her limbs contorted, the blood from three wounds clotted on her

fare and clothes, one hand placed over the wound in the breast and one clutching the sheet, this in the unearthly quiet of the midnight hour was the scene as it was presented to the group of officers and men of the neighborhood as they gathered around the scene of the terrible tragedy.

Neighborhood Aroused.

All along the road leading both ways from the house of the tragedy lights could be seen gleaming from the windows of the houses. The inmates, awed and frightened by the terrible act, were keeping vigil through the remaining hours of the night. Those who had gathered around the house conversed in hushed whispers and now and then an involuntary glance was cast at the doors of the pitch-dark rooms of the stricken house and in the murky shadows of the surrounding undergrowth, as though it were half expected that the murderer with his death dealing weapon, was crouched somewhere in the shadows.

By the gateway stood a wailing group – the family of the woman who lay stark and stiff among the goary sheets in the house beyond, her form dimly visible through the open window. In that group were the father and mother, the infant child and three brothers and sisters of the murdered woman, the child wailing piteously, the one grown sister almost swooning on the grass and the mother shocked and almost unconscious from the weight of terrible fright and great sorrow. None of them would enter the house.

The Father's Story.

Charles Stevens seemed very much excited as he told the story of the deed and also of the interview he had had with Anderson a few minutes before his daughter was shot to death. He said:

"My daughter had been married to Anderson a little over two years and during that time, there had been a continual disagreement between them. Not long ago my daughter brought suit for a divorce and they have not been living together for the past seven weeks. Last night Mr. Whitely was here and Anderson came up and we talked the matter over. I said to him in the presence of Mr. Whitely that if he would behave himself that he could take my daughter and live with her, but that he had to take her away, as he had caused enough trouble already in the family. Mr. Whitely said. "Anderson, that seems to be a fair 'thing.'" Anderson said that he was willing to do it and turned and walked away as if he was going to town. Mr. Whitely stayed about ten minutes and left. This was between 9 and 10 o'clock. I think.

"I went on in the house and put the light out and went to bed. About five minutes. I think, after Mr. Whitely had gone. I heard some one on the front porch and then the door was broken open and Anderson rushed into the room where my wife, little boy and myself were, shouting, G-d-you. I've got you all now; I am going to kill you all. G-d-you, and light that lamp. I was thinking where my axe was, and I was trying to get out the door. He saw what I was doing and ran at me and shot at me twice. I ran out the back door, and when I got out there I remembered that I did not know where my axe was. I ran out the back way and stayed a good while. He had said that he had been working for Trapp and was boarding at August Herr's in town. He had been drinking. I think."

Mother of Dead Woman.

Mrs. Stevens, the mother of the girl although witnessing enough to almost craze her, told the story in a very calm manner. Said she:

"My daughter had one child a little over a year old. She was up stairs with the baby. My son-in-law and other daughter were also up there. When Anderson came in the house and started to shooting, and after my husband had run out, I got in the closet in the room, and Anderson went out in the hall and called to Millie, his wife, to come down. She started down the steps and I think that he grabbed her and dragged her out into the yard. As soon as he got her out in the yard I heard three pistol shots, and with each shot my daughter screamed. My little boy had lighted the lamp

and ran out the back way. Anderson then brought my daughter into the room and put her on the bed we had just gotten out of. She was alive. He told her he was jealous of her was the reason that he had killed her. He said that he loved her and that he, too, would soon be with her; that he was going to kill himself. He then asked her if there was anything she wanted. There was a crack in the closet door all the time and I was becoming weak. My daughter told him that she wanted a drink of water. He went out and brought a glass of water to her. I then could hear her saying that she wanted to see her mother before she died. I wanted to come out but he was so weak I could not move. He went to her once more and told her that he would soon be with her and then walked from the room. I never heard another sound. My daughter was dead when they came back a few minutes later and I came out of the closet."

It seems that Mrs. Stevens remained in the closet from the time of the shooting until nearly 12 o'clock, when some of the neighboring farm hands came over to the house. The rest of the family were in a perfect state of hysteria and their cries were all the answers one could get from them.

Gives Himself Up.

Anderson arrived in the city about 12 o'clock, accompanied by his stepfather, a man named Murphy. He at once gave himself up, telling frankly and fully what he had done. Officer May accompanied him to the jail, where he was locked up by Jailer John Ashby. Messenger reporter arrived at the jail just after Jailer Ashby

A Messenger reporter arrived at the jail just after Jailer Ashby had locked the door. The jailer again opened the door and called to Anderson, who had gone to the rear of the corridor where the other prisoners were. He at once came forward. He is a tall, dark complected, smooth-laced man, apparently twenty-eight years of age. tall and strong looking. In response to questions of the reporter and Jailer Ashby he told his story as follows:

"Yes. I shot her. She was the daughter of Charles Stephens and was my wife. I married her two years ago. She had a child one year old then. We separated several times and always because of her people interfering with us. She wrote to me always to come and get her. That is why I went today. I did not buy the pistol to kill her. I bought it this morning because I went to take her away and I thought I would need it. When her father told me the terms I could have her on I shot her because I loved her so I could not agree to take her on his terms. I think I shot her four times. Anyhow, the pistol will tell. She fell when I shot her first. I shot again as she was falling and twice after she fell. I thought her father was going to do something to me before I shot her. I don't know what he was going to do. My mother lives on Mrs. Hefner's farm and I worked for Mrs. Hefner sometimes. I have been with my brother, above Owensboro, for seven weeks. It was there my wife wrote to me to come to her. I have a brother living at Masonville who is married to her sister."

Cool and Indifferent.

The man told his story quite coolly and indifferently and showed no signs of excitement or remorse. He spoke in short, plain sentences and always answered directly the questions asked. When the interview ended he said to Jailer Ashby, "Well, partner, am I to have no bed in here tonight?"

"Yes," replied the jailer, "You boys back there double up and give him a bed."

"Never mind said the prisoner, as he sunk to the stone floor, "I can sleep here."

He was coatless and shoeless and thus he doubled up in a corner in the extreme end of the corridor, away from the other prisoners, the great iron' door shut him in.

Fears a Mob.

Anderson was almost frenzied with fright when he gave himself up to the officers. He said he was sure an effort would be made to mob him and asked the police officers to guard him. The reply was that they could do nothing for him in the event the citizens of the community were determined to mob him. The people of the neighborhood in which the murder was committed are thoroughly aroused over the enormity of the crime and it is feared that an effort will be made to deal summary justice to the murderer.

Constable Hurt and Deputy Jailer Howard were among the first arrivals on the scene of the murder. Sheriff Short came later. Coroner Hayden left for the scene at 2:30 this morning for the purpose of holding an inquest over the body.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 17 July 1902, p.1:



Murderer Taken From the Jail and Hanged at the City Scales.

The Job Was Executed With Neatness and Dispatch.

Mob Gathered Quietly and Met With No Resistance by Either Word or Deed .

THE CRIME AND ITS CONSEQUENCE

Josh Anderson, the wife-murderer, was taken from the jail at 2 o'clock this morning and hanged by a mob.

The coroner's inquest was held between 3 and 4 o'clock, and the body was cut down at 4:10.

The first that was known at the jail of the mob was when they appeared at the front door of the residence portion of the jail and broke in. They demanded the keys of Deputy Jailer Howard, and the demand was refused. They then went to the bed in which he was lying, raised up the pillow on which his head was resting and there were the keys. The rest was easy. One door after another turned on its hinges, all being opened as readily as if the jailer himself were doing the work. There was not a moment's delay.

When the cell-room was reached in the upper story the door was opened and two men entered the corridor. They found Anderson in his cell and told him to get up and put on his clothes. Only one member of the mob spoke a word. He said:

"Josh, get up and put on your clothes, and be quick about it."

"All right" Anderson replied; "I know what you've come for I'm not going to make any trouble. All I ask is that you don't shoot me. I don't want to be shot."

"We're not going to shoot you" his visitor said: "we didn't come fixed for that."

Not another word was said except in a low tone to give some necessary direction. It was certainly the last word that Anderson ever spoke that was heard by anybody except his executioners

The Death March.

When Anderson had put on clothes the cell door was opened by a pull on the lever at the corridor door. He stepped out as cheerfully as he would have done if the mob had been going to

turn him loose. The rope was placed about his neck, but neither his hands nor his feet were tied. He was rushed out of the jail as quickly as possible, the party going almost in a run. The chosen place of execution was the city scales, which is an ideal place for the business. The rope was thrown over a beam some twelve or thirteen feet from the ground. The victim was apparently lifted high off the ground while the rope was being made fast, and then dropped.

There was not a sound from the shed that could be heard by those at the jail forty yards away, and as soon as those present were satisfied that death had taken place there was a low word or two of command, and the men at the scales dispersed. As they were seen to do so, the guards that had been placed to prevent the near approach of the curious, left also, and in a few minutes had all disappeared, and the tragedy was over.

Preparing for the Deed.

Ever since the murder for which the mob exacted vengeance, there has been some talk of a lynching. There were rumors in the city Monday that a mob was being arranged, to be composed of people from three sections of the county. Yelvington, where Anderson first married; Masonville, where he married the girl he killed and below the city where he murdered her. Tuesday it was talked of in certain circles that the mob had failed to connect with a leader, and would he back later, either Tuesday or Wednesday night.

Wednesday afternoon several people were heard to say "there is going to be a mob tonight," but there was nothing definite that could be learned, and the rumor could never be traced for obvious reasons. During the day the ground about the jail was doubtless reconnoitered, as two or three pairs of men walked out St. Elizabeth street at different times and appeared to be much interested in the river. These doubtless selected the spot at which the hanging should take place. They could not have done better.

In the early part of the night men came in over different roads to the city, riding singly in most cases, though sometimes in pairs. It was after midnight when the gathering took place which was only to be broken up when the work was done. All of the men apparently wore masks and some of them had pistols in their hands. Two of them were stationed on the two corners of Main and St. Elizabeth streets, one or two more were stationed on an alley leading from Frederica street to St. Elizabeth, north of the jail, and there were a few around the chosen spot for the execution. Seven were detailed to go to the jail and bring out the prisoner. How well they succeeded has been told.

Well Drilled Gang.

The mob was the best managed that has been seen in the city. There was no disorder in the assemblage. There was no loud talking. Hardly an oath was heard. There was no pistol firing or any attempt to disturb the peaceful slumber of the citizens. They adopted the star-route motto of celerity, certainty and security and to it. They left no detail unattended to and took no unnecessary steps, unless the reported keg of powder was a fact.

They Left No Trace.

The masked mob left only three traces behind. These were the dead man, the rope around his neck and a green beech club about three feet long. There were no signs of the sledge hammers, crowbars and other implements used by the regulation lynchers. They did not leave a rag of their masks behind. One man was seen to pull his mask off and throw it down, but his comrade said something to him and he stepped back and picked it up. There was an evident determination to hide every trace that could lead to identification. The mob was perfectly sober, and was thus able to perform its work with neatness and dispatch.

Jailer Ashby's Statement.

Jailer John Ashby says that he was taken by surprise when the men came after Anderson. He says that he did not anticipate anything of the kind, although he had heard some rumors that Anderson would be mobbed, but he did not place any reliance in the report. He says that after the men had got down to the jail and he realized what they wanted he came down stairs, and entered the hall, when two very large men, armed with shot guns and with their faces covered with masks, approached him and demanded that he take a seat in the chair. He complied with their request and remained there until all the men had left that vicinity. Mr. Ashby says that one of the men had a keg in his arms, which evidently contained powder, as two or three ounces of powder was found scattered on the door steps this morning. He says that it was impossible for him to identify any of the men, although it was a beautiful moonlight night. He said that all the men he saw wore masks and were armed. Mr. Ashby thinks that there were between forty and sixty men in the mob.

The Coroner's Inquest.

Coroner Hayden was notified of the hanging about 3 o'clock and was soon on the grounds. When he reached the scene of the hanging he found Anderson's body still swinging by the neck just as it was left by the mob. There were five or six men there who had heard of the hanging and had gone to view the remains. Coroner Hayden summoned a jury and held an inquest. This was done before the body was cut down, which was exactly at 4:10 o'clock.

The first witness was Mrs. Ashby, wife of Jailer John Ashby. She said "The first I knew of it a crowd of masked men rushed in the front door, leading to the residence. The men wore broad brimmed hats and black masks. I asked them what they wanted and they answered that they had come after that man. I pleaded and begged with them, and they said if they did not get him they would blow the jail up. The mob rushed in and got him and took him out of the jail. I did not know who any of men were."

Mrs. John Howard, wife of Deputy Jailer Howard, was the next witness. Mrs. Howard said, "I was with my husband in the office, which is down stairs. The crowd called to my husband to let them in and he answered that he would not; they then broke the door open and demanded the keys. Mr. Howard said that he had no keys, when they said they would have them. They then tore up the bed and found the keys under the pillow. When they got the keys they rushed in the jail and soon had Anderson and them took him away".

The only other witness was Deputy Jailer Howard. He substantiated the statements made by his wife and Mrs. Ashby He stated further that the men were armed with guns and pistols. He also stated that they ordered him to throw- up his hands and he obeyed, and after the men got the keys they took the man out.

This was all the evidence heard and after some consideration, the jury returned a verdict that Anderson came to his death at the hands of an unknown mob of armed men The jury was composed of W. R. Armstrong, J. W. Linton, H. N. Lauger, T. A. DeWitt, J. M. Lingang and C. H. Bennett.

They Broke the Door.

The front door of the jail shows an amount of violence that might have been done by determined boys of ten years old. The door is double, and has panels at the bottom. One of these was kicked in and the strip on the inside that holds in the panel was partially split off .The fastening at the bottom was also torn loose. Mrs. Ashby says that a couple of small boys could have pushed the door open, and that it has been in that condition for a long time.

Rope Used for Souvenirs.

The rope with which Anderson was hung was a new grass rope, of half-inch size. It was about twenty feet long. The noose in it was made by a hand that was not used to the business, being

nothing more than a rough slip knot, which accounts for the bruises on the victim's neck. As soon as the body was cut down crowd helped itself to the rope, which was cut in pieces for souvenirs.

Hundreds Saw the Body.

Alter Coroner Hayden cut down Anderson's body he ordered it taken to the rooms of the Owensboro Undertaking association, where it was prepared for burial. Hundreds of people called within an hour two to see it. They found the corpse of a man six feet high and built like an athlete. Its face was swollen and had a livid cast. Around its neck was a stripe half an inch wide that looked like it had been burned. The flesh above and below was swollen leaving a channel half an inch wide and deep. The knot in the rope was imprinted on the back of the neck, showing that it had almost cut through skin.

The Mob Monday Night.

There seems to be no reason to doubt his statement that the mob attempted to hang Anderson Monday night. There was a gathering at a tobacco factory in the western part of the city, and a number of men were seen in the eastern part of the city. It is explained that there was a misunderstanding as to the rendezvous, and that the two parties did not get together on this account. This was found out Tuesday and a better arrangement was made for Wednesday night, and no chances were taken on a miscarriage.

One party of young fellows, five or six in number, and all strangers attracted some attention early in the night. They went about 10 o'clock to a saloon and took several drinks. They were quite hilarious and the more drunken ones wore an atmosphere of importance. An hour later they went to another saloon. Here one of them, a cub of eighteen took a piece of black goods out of his pocket, and going to a mirror put it over his face and admired himself in a mask. This gang did not connect with the mob, as they were all too drunk before the work of the commenced.

Came After the Body.

Two of Anderson's brothers, J. A. and Ed Anderson, from the Masonville country, came in this afternoon after the body. They selected a coffin and took the body away with them for burial, which will take place tomorrow morning in the family burying ground near Masonville.

Anderson's History.

Josh Anderson was born in Anderson county. His mother was a sister of Mr. R. F. Barker, of Philpot and the family was respectable in every way. Anderson grew up as one of the tough young men of the neighborhood in which he lived, but never did anything that would bring him in touch with the law. He was not industrious, but worked by spurts. Some years ago he married Miss Minnie Heidenrick, who lived near Thruston. Her father was dead and her mother had married again. Some time after the marriage Anderson and his wife left and went to Greensburg, Westmoreland county Pa., where he lived two years. There they had the child, which lived thirteen days. After a time Anderson returned, a widower, stating that he had lost his wife from pneumonia. There were suspicions, that kept afloat openly that he poisoned his wife in order that he might get a farm which belonged to her. He had induced her to make a will bequeathing it to him, although she was not of age. The family talked about suing to recover it, but did not do so, and he sold it and spent the money.

About three years ago Anderson took to drinking, and one night he went to the home of his sister near Yelvington and shot himself. The ball entered his left breast just below the nipple and passed through the lung. It lodged near the backbone and could be felt to the day of his death. The physicians who were summoned to attend him thought that he could not live twenty-four hours but they pulled him through by most consummate skill and close attention, though he was confined to his bed for here months and was under treatment for the better part of a year. The case was of such

importance from a surgical standpoint that it was reported to the Daviess County Medical society in a paper that attracted much attention.

A little more than two years ago Anderson married Miss Millie Stevens, a daughter of Charles Stevens, who lived at that time near Masonville. A brother of Anderson married another daughter of Stevens.

Sorry for His Mother.

A lady who has known Anderson for many years, went to the jail to see him yesterday. She tried to talk to him on religious lines, but he discouraged her, telling her that that it was no use, that he had gone too far for that.

"Are you not sorry for killing your wife?" the lady asked.

"Not a bit" he said "I am glad I killed her. She ought to have been killed. I am sorry for my mother, though; I know she will be troubled."

The lady gave the heartless brute up and left the jail as quickly as she could.

What Judge Haskins Says.

County Judge Haskins says: "I never had the slightest intimation that such a thing was going to happen, for if I had, Anderson would certainly have been protected from mob violence. However since the hanging I have heard it intimated that such a movement was on foot for several days. One thing is certain, the mob knew its business. From the best information that I can gather none of the county officials knew anything about the mob coming and I understand that the police knew nothing of it until Anderson was hanged . It was the quietest piece of work I ever heard of."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 23 September 1956, p.10D:

Mobs Provided Quick 'Justice' In Owensboro At Turn Of 20th Century; 4 Persons Hanged

By Frankie Scott

Our peaceful city was not always so law-abiding. Time was when Owensboro citizenry, if aroused, took the law into its own hands – lynch law. And it wasn't so many years ago.

In fact at the turn of the century Owensboro had at least three lynchings to its infamy, and in 1902, another blackened its conscience.

This was the hanging of Josh Anderson, wife-murderer.

The unfortunate incident that brought about Anderson's untimely end occurred on July 8, 1902, about 11 p.m. on a farm near Maceo.

There Anderson shot down his young bride of two years in front of her father's house.

The account carried in the local newspaper said that Anderson had tried earlier that evening to see the girl but that her father had refused him that privilege. He had returned to town, stopped at several taverns, and well fortified by liquor and a gun, once again visited the farm.

In a drunken rage he demanded to see her, threatening the rest of her family with death if she didn't come out. Millie, at the time, was slow to awake and it wasn't until her husband entered the house that she awoke and descended the steps from her upstairs bedroom.

As she was hurrying down the final steps, he grabbed her, drug her out into the yard and shot her three times. Seconds later he picked her up, carried her into the house and carefully and tenderly placed her on a bed, mumbling incoherently to her all the while.

His words, according to Millie's mother, who remained hidden in a closet in the room, were that he loved her and would soon be with her. He promised to kill himself so that they could "be together" soon.

As the life drifted swiftly from Millie's body, she made one last request for a drink of water. The man who was her husband and her murderer gave it to her, and shortly afterwards, she died. Anderson left immediately.

All of Millie's family had scattered in fear of Anderson, who had been brandishing his gun and threatening their lives, except Mrs. Stephens who listened and watched through a crack in the door of the bedroom closet as her daughter died.

At midnight Anderson arrived in town. Accompanied by his step-father, he gave himself up to the authorities and told what he had done, frankly and without a trace of remorse.

News of the tragedy spread like wildfire across the closely knit community. And through the remaining hours of the night, it was reported that neighbors of the slain woman kept vigil, their kerosene' lamps dotting the countryside.

One reporter gave the following account of Anderson's behavior after his confession.

As the wife-killer was being taken to his cell by the jailer, he coolly remarked: "Well, partner, am I to have no bed in here tonight?"

"Yes," replied the jailer, "you boys back there double up and give him a bed."

"Never mind," said the prisoner as he sunk to the stone floor, "I can sleep here."

He was coatless and shoeless and thus he doubled up in a corner at the extreme end of the corridor, away from the other prisoners. The great iron door shut him in.

And thus began his wait. He was expecting he told the jailer sometime later the mob to come. He was waiting for them, and when they came it was no surprise.

Anderson, according to the press accounts, was a run-of-the-mill no-good. He'd never done anything serious enough to be caught and jailed, but then he'd never done anything good either.

As a boy he'd bullied those weaker than himself, had been mentioned in a number of petty crimes' and was known as the "tough" of the neighborhood. It wasn't because he came from bad stock. His father was an Anderson of Anderson County, his mother, a daughter of one of the prominent families of Central City.

However, Anderson never quite learned the meaning of respectability. Nor of industry.

At an early age he married an orphan girl who had inherited a large sum of money and property, Two years later she died under mysterious circumstances. Rumors were persistent that he had poisoned her, but it was never proved, In less than a year Anderson had squandered every cent of his inheritance. He then returned home and became quite despondent.

He even threatened to end his own life. At least three things could have been the cause of his despondency – the loss of his wife, or the constant nagging of a guilty conscience. But what actually caused him to attempt it will never be known.

He was visiting his sister in Yelvington when he shot himself. For a year he lingered at the point of death from the chest wound, but due to the obstinate soundness of his constitution he recovered.

Shortly afterward he married Millie Stephens and they lived together – off and on – for a period of two years, or up until about seven weeks before he killed her Then she left him and filed suit for divorce. He couldn't stand to lose her, he told the jailer afterward. He'd rather see her dead

than living away from him. So in jealous rage he shot her, paving the way for a worse end for himself.

Anderson was a big man, described as "tall, dark, and strong looking." He had just passed his 28th birthday when he was lynched.

It was on the morning of July 17, 1902, just eight days after his wife's death. He was hanged at 2 a.m. at rope's end on the city scales located just across the alley from the jail.

One account of the event stated: "The deed was executed with surprising coolness and tact, and although several were on the alert and a number of people were watching for the mob, the deed had already been done and the mob dispersed before any one knew that the attempt had been made."

It seemed that shortly before 2 a.m. a group of approximately 40 men, dressed in black – black masks, hats and suits – demanded admittance to the jail. Shotguns and gleaming pistols flashed in their hands.

Deputy Jailer Howard refused to let them in, whereupon they crashed the door and on upstairs to the cell where Anderson was confined. j .

It was but the work of a moment to secure the key for the cell, fling open the door and drag the condemned man from one form of captivity to a more permanent one.

Anderson said nothing. No cry of surprise escaped his lips as he was rushed to his death by self-appointed executioners.

In less than five minutes his body was swinging in the moon light, and immediately afterward the executioners dispersed.

Minutes later the body was discovered by one of the lookouts who had been charged with the responsibility of preventing mob violence. He was on a routine check of the area when he saw the body. The deed had been done so quickly and quietly that he had suspected nothing.

Rumors of a mob had been afloat ever since Anderson was arrested, but after eight days had passed and nothing had happened, it was a little unexpected when it did.

However, news of the deed spread with surprising rapidity and in less than an hour people from every section converged upon the scene for a view of the ghastly spectacle. As long as the body remained, a crowd of curious spectators thronged the scene.

At 4 a.m., the coroner reached the scene, impaneled a jury and held an inquest. At 4:30 a.m. the body was cut down. Strands of the hemp rope were pounced upon by the spectators who wanted a souvenir. Later the same morning the body was given to relatives who took it to the Habit community for interment.

Thus was lynch law enacted and though the local newspapers editorially condemned the mob action, the press stories from start to finish indicated the general belief that Josh Anderson got what was coming to him.

Brief accounts of the other three lynchings mentioned earlier in the story are given below.

Holt Lynching

At 2:30 a.m. on Dec. 26, 1896, Alfred Holt was hanged by a mob who took him from jail under much the same circumstances as Anderson was taken – quietly and without any show of resistance. Holt was hanged for the murder of a policeman on the night following a November election in 1896. Holt wrested Aquilla White's billet from him, took his pistol and shot him. He was in the process of being tried on the 24th of December. The court adjourned for Christmas, and the day after that Holt was hanged to a tree in the courthouse yard. His defense was to have been ready the day he was lynched.

May Lynching

The 1900 Daviess County, KY census records that Clara Murphy was the mother of 12 children, 2 of whom were then deceased. The children of Richard T. Anderson & Clara Anderson included – Ed (1866-1945); Rosella (1867-1943, married James H. Hazelrigg & Robert Lee Ray); Thomas (1870-); Horace (1872-1947); Joshua (1874-1902); Pattie (1877-1931, married Lonzo Dakota Gilmore); Joseph (1878-1963); Robert (1882-1934); Crealia (1887-1968, married John Wesley Swaggert); and Effie (1890-1915, married Lawson Yates).

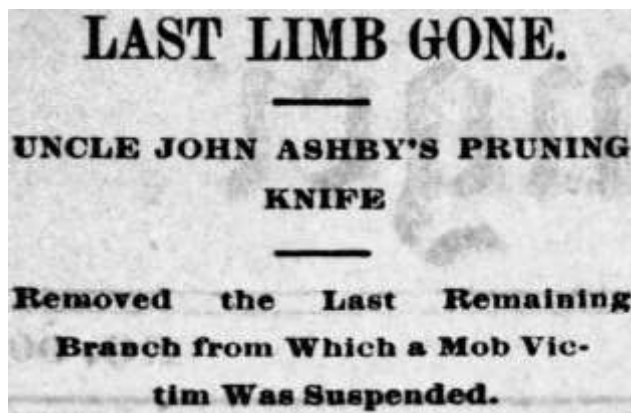
Josh Anderson and his parents located in Daviess County, KY during 1878-1887. A birth record shows that Joshua's brother, Joseph, was born in Garrard County in 1878.

Josh Anderson married Minnie Hidenrick on 17 January 1896 in Daviess County, KY. Minnie died in 1899. Josh Anderson (farm laborer, widowed) on 7 June 1900 was enumerated in the 1900 census of Daviess County, KY. Two days later on June 9 he married Millie Stephens in Daviess County, KY. Millie was killed by Josh on 8 July 1902. Josh was hanged by a mob in Owensboro on 17 July 1902. He was buried at Habit in Daviess County, KY.



Other Articles Related to Lynchings in Daviess County:

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 14 April 1899, p.2:



The last historic limb on any of the trees in the court house yard has been removed, and not a one remains which can be remembered as a branch from which some murder or rape fiend secured his transportation by the rope route to that land from which no traveler returns.

Jailer Ashby has been giving the trees in the court house yard a general pruning this week, and cut off the limb from which the last victim of lynchings was suspended. It was the limb to which Alf Holt, colored, was hanged on early morning of December 26 for the brutal murder of Policeman Aquilla White on the day after the presidential election in November, 1896. Holt was hanged to a limb on the sycamore tree which stands just south of the east gate of the court house yard.

To a limb of the elm which stands in the walk east of the court house, two negroes were hanged. One of them was Richard May, who was lynched on Sunday night of July 13, 1884, for an attempted rape upon an invalid daughter of Lod Kelly. It was this mob which killed Jailer Lucas. From the same limb Dock Jones was suspended on the night of December 19, 1889, by a mob for

the murder of John Westerfield. The limb was removed when the old elm was given a pruning about four or five years ago.

Many years ago a negro rape fiend was hanged by a mob to the limb of a locust which stood on the south side of the court house. The tree died several years ago.

However, any future mobs – may there never be any future ones – need not become discouraged because of the removal of the branches from the trees in the court house yard which has rendered service at lynching bees in the past, because Uncle John Ashby has left one or two limbs which could be very handily utilized in the event Judge Lynch should call a special session of his court to dispense the death penalty to any fiend who commits an assault upon a woman or without provocation coldly murders a fellow being.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 15 November 1901, p.2:



The large elm tree, which for over half a century has stood near the middle of the walk approaching the court house on the east side, has been removed in order to make room for the new concrete pavement. Its downfall was witnessed by a crowd of citizens, who recalled incidents connected with it which they never will forget.

No less than three men have shuffled off this mortal coil while suspended twixt heaven and earth, with the rope attached to a limb of this tree. The limb, round which linger so many memories of dark deeds, was cut off by Jailer Ashby three years ago. It was long and angular and reached directly across the walk. Just before it was sawed off, it turned white and looked as if it felt the combined burden of all three of the dead men.

There are other trees in the court house yard which have been used for the same purpose. Perhaps there is no court house yard in this section of the country which has supplied so many handy gallows. Middle aged residents readily remember at least eight or ten executions which have taken place there, none of which were legal.

The first victim is not remembered by any of the older citizens. Like all the rest he was a negro.

There is none who will not recall the actions of the cruel mob which hanged Dick May, accused of an attempted assault on the daughter of Sod Kelly and the heartless manner in which Jailer W. J. Lucas was shot down in the presence of his family, while protecting the prisoner. The band of thirty or forty men rode silently into town on the night of Sunday, July 13, 1884. At that time the jail was situated in the southeast corner of the court house yard. Possession of the keys to

the jail were stoutly denied by the faithful jailer and he had to be killed in his tracks before the band could pass over him.

The negro was rushed to the elm tree and summarily dealt with.

By the time Doc Jones was lynched, nearly ten years after, the old tree was a recognized place of execution, where terrible crimes could be avenged swiftly. Jones, for no apparent reason, killed John Westerfield. His period of confinement lasted only until such a time as mobs can do their work, at the midnight hour, when he was added to the list of those who before him had paid their last earthly debt.

The old limb had then served its purpose, who knows? It showed signs of weakness and was unsightly from that hour. Jailer Ashby took almost pity on it and it was removed as a worn instrument which had done its duty.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 31 January 1926, p.1B:

Jail's Trophy Case Tells Grim Stories Of The Past

Crimes Committed Years Ago Retold

In the old trophy case at Daviess county's home of the wayward are many instruments used by and on criminals more than 18 years ago. Around some of these seemingly harmless looking articles revolve stories of horrible murders, while others mutely tell the story of mob hangings and scenes of disorder.

One 30-year-old noose in the case bears the tag "used to hang Alf Holt, December 26, 1896." This recalls the story of Policeman Aquilla White's murder the day after the presidential election in 1896, by Alf Holt, a negro he was attempting to arrest.

Patrolman White met Holt in front of an old cabin between Poplar and Sycamore streets on Fifth. He demanded that the negro surrender but the offender had different ideas. He and four other negroes overpowered the policeman and shot him to death with his own revolver. Holt was soon captured and placed in the Daviess county jail.

More than a month later, the night before the jury was to return its verdict in the case, a mob, reputed to have been composed of prominent Owensboroans, raided the jail, took Holt to the court house lawn and hanged him to a tree limb.

The next morning the jury was dismissed and at the following term of grand jury, persons suspected to have been in the mob were questioned but no indictments were returned.

Another noose bearing the tag "used to hang Jack Anderson July 17, 1902." is in the case. It tells the story of a man murdering his wife arid afterward paying the supreme penalty at the hands of a mob.

Anderson, who lived on the Henderson road, shot his wife in their yard. He was taken from the jailer and hanged on an improvised scaffold in the rear of the jail, on the city scales.

A hatchet the tag of which was concealed, doubtlessly was the instrument used by a Daviess county "hatchet murderer." A razor which very likely was the weapon used by some negro on his enemy, several long bladed knives and about five bullets, most of which are of large calibre, hang

in the case, without labels. Only imagination and speculation are drawn upon to reconstruct the stories they might tell.

A small ladle, tagged as being used by countefeiters, also hangs in the cabinet. One wooden key, carved by prisoners, who cherished the idea of breaking jail is among the trophies collected by Jailer John Ashby, who was the last jailer to contribute to the assortment.

A bottle bearing the label "Bottle of moonshine from Edmonson county" is hardly visible in a bottom corner of the case. It was probably a curio in the days when legal liquor sold for 75 cents a quart and moonshining was a rare offense except in the mountainous sections.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 4 April 2002, pp.1C & 3C:

Some trees on courthouse lawn have borne strange fruit

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

"Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees."
—"Strange Fruit," by Lewis Allen,
as sung by Billie Holiday 1938.

A full moon casts eerie shadows across the lawn of the Daviess County Courthouse. And sometimes, when the wind howls at night, you can almost hear the screams of long ago.

If the spirits of those who die violent deaths do return, as some claim, to the places of their demise, then the Daviess County Courthouse is the most haunted place in Owensboro.

These trees – or their ancestors – have borne Allen's "strange fruit."

Old newspaper clippings say that at least four men – and possibly as many as 10 – were hanged from the courthouse trees more than a century ago. And not one of them was a legal execution.

An article in the Twice-A-Week Messenger of a century ago says at least eight men died on those trees. And it speculates that "perhaps there is no courthouse yard in this section of the country which has supplied so many handy gallows."

Jana Evans Braziel's "History of Lynching in the United States" says 118 people were lynched in Kentucky between 1882 and 1930. If that's true, then Owensboro had more than its share.

Records of local lynchings are hard to come by. It's not a popular subject with historians.

But the most famous of Daviess County's lynchings came shortly after midnight on July 14, 1884.

Dick May, a 23-year-old black man accused of the attempted rape of a white Sorgho girl, was awaiting trial in the jail - then located on the southeast corner of the courthouse lawn.

Shortly after midnight that morning, a mob estimated at about 40 masked horsemen converged on the jail, demanding that Jailer William J. Lucas bring May out to them.

Lucas said they'd take his prisoner over his dead body. And they did.

Lucas was shot to death in front of his wife and children. And May was dragged from the jail to a nearby elm.

A reporter on the scene described how May's arms were "bound firmly" behind him. But his feet were left free to kick.

A rope "the size of a plow line" was tied around May's neck, tossed over a limb and secured. Several of the men lifted May as high as they could – and then dropped him.

He died there in the dark, his feet desperately trying to reach the ground a foot below.

Although the lynching attracted a sizable crowd of spectators, no one bothered to cut May down until 8 the next morning.

There were reports that the mob also intended to hang Silas Clark, another black man who was awaiting trial on charges of robbery and "a similar act to the one for which May was hanged."

But apparently, the mob felt badly about killing the jailer and left without harming Clark.

On Dec. 19, 1889, Doc Jones, a black barber charged with murdering a barber named John Westerfield "for no apparent reason," was lynched by another mob.

On Dec. 26, 1896, Alfred Holt, a young black man accused of murdering Aquilla White, a city policeman, was dragged from the jail to the trees on the courthouse lawn.

At least one white man also died there.

John Anderson was reportedly lynched by a mob incensed by Anderson's alleged murder of his wife. Some reports say he was hanged from the city scales on the south side of the courthouse lawn.

Around 1900, a large elm on the east side of the courthouse was cut down to make way for a new concrete sidewalk.

"No less than three men have shuffled off this mortal coil while suspended twixt heaven and earth with the rope attached to a limb of this tree," the Twice-A-Week Messenger eulogized.

A limb cut off the tree three years earlier was "long and angular and reached directly across the walk," the paper wrote. "Just before (the jailer) sawed it off, it turned white as if it felt the combined burden of all three of the dead men."

But that wasn't the county's only hanging tree, the story said. "There are other trees in the courthouse yard which have been used for the same purpose," it added.

In the mid-1970s, the county cut down a sycamore on the east side of the courthouse – a tree that legend said had also borne strange fruit.

It is perhaps ironic – and totally fitting – that in April 1988, the county dedicated a tree – a weeping cherry – on the courthouse lawn as a living monument to victims of violent crime.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 25 April 2002, p.3B:

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

A few weeks ago, I wrote about 19th century lynchings at the courthouse.

The last lynching, I said, was of a white man named John Anderson, who was reportedly lynched by a mob incensed by Anderson's alleged murder of his wife.

Cindy Evans of Lewisport provided some more information and a correction.

"It was Josh (Joshua) Anderson instead of John," she wrote. "He was accused of shooting his wife, Millie Stephens Anderson, three times and killing her. The article in the Owensboro Messenger stated that they had domestic difficulties since the marriage."

Evans said the lynch mob gathered in several saloons downtown and stormed the jail on July 18, 1902. We're coming up on the 100th anniversary.

"They took Josh out and hung him at the city scales near the river," she wrote. "These were masked men and never made to pay for their crime of hanging Josh."

Anderson's brothers, Ed and Joe, "and two of his sisters, including my great-grandmother Rosella Anderson Ray, came for his body, which was interred in the Habit cemetery," Evans wrote.



See also :

- “The Heroism of Lucas: Conduct of Our Lamented Jailer Complimented”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 18 July 1884, p.1;
- “Reminiscences of the Mob: Fears of an Outbreak By The Negroes Now Dispeller”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 18 July 1884, p.4;
- “Will The Mob Be Punished: Strong Charge To The Grand Jury By Judge Little, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 22 July 1884, p.4;
- “After The Mob: Observations on Men and Things From Memory”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 20 December 1889, p.1;
- Editorial on the Messenger’s reporting on the lynching of Dock Jones, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 20 December 1889, p.2;
- Editorial: “The Recent Mob”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 22 December 1889, p.4;
- “After The Mob: Judge Little Cracks Down on the Jones Lynchers”, Owensboro Weekly Messenger, 3 January 1890, p.3;
- The Holt Case, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 6 November 1896, p.5; 7 November 1896, p.5; 8 November 1896, p.5; 10 November 1896, p.3; 12 November 1896, p.5; 17 November 1896, p.5; 22 November 1896, p.4; 25 November 1896, p.5; 27 November 1896, p.1; 28 November 1896, p.5; 29 November 1896, p.4; 1 December 1896, p.5; 2 December 1896, pp.5 & 8; 5 December 1896, p.6; 6 December 1896, p.3; 9 December 1896, p.5; 12 December 1896, p.4; 16 December 1896, p.1; 17 December 1896, p.3; 22 December 1896, p.1, 23 December 1896, p.5;
- “The Holt Trial”, Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 2 December 1896, p.4; 16 December 1896, pp.2 & 4; 18 December 1896, p.6; 23 December 1896, pp.1 & 4; 25 December 1896, pp.1 & 6;
- “The Holt Lynching”, Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 30 December 1896, pp.1 & 2;
- “The Holt Mob Investigation”, Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 1 January 1897, pp.1 & 2;
- “Circuit Court: As Predicted, the Grand Jury Indicted None of the Holt Mob”, Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 6 January 1897, p.4;
- “Postponed Till Jan. 22: The Trial of Holt’s Accomplices at Greenville”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 13 January 1897, pp.1, 4 & 5;
- “The Trial of White’s Murderers”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 21 January 1897, p.8;
- “The Baskett Trial: The Jury Empaneled and Evidence Being Heard”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 26 January 1897, p.1;
- “Testimony Closed For the Commonwealth in the Prosecution Against Geo. Baskett”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 27 January 1897, p.1;
- “Evidence All IN: And the Arguments in the Baskett Trial, Greenville, Will Be Heard Today”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 28 January 1897, p.1;

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Daviess County has had five court ordered executions:

negro	1838	rape
Curtis Richardson	1 November 1854	murder
Roy Green	17 February 1905	murder
Robert Mathley	7 July 1905	murder
Rainey Bethea	14 August 1936	rape & robbery



A tragic scene of a soiled history

