

# Execution of Thompson & Powell in 1864

By Jerry Long  
c.2025



Monument in St. Alphonsus Catholic Church Cemetery,  
Mount St. Joseph, Daviess County, KY.



**Owensboro Monitor, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 27 July 1864, p.3:**

## Great Excitement in Henderson!

Last Sunday evening the Palestine from Henderson had on board a large number of citizens from Henderson, who had fled from the reign of terror existing in that place. From what we can learn, Friday morning Colonel Syper, commanding the Confederate forces stationed near the city, sent in a flag of truce, demanding its surrender, and upon its refusal by Colonel Harrington, of the

Federal army, one hour was granted for the removal of the women and children. At the end of the allotted time no attack was made, and it is evident this was merely a ruse to find what number of troops held the place, and what were the prospects for the recapture of the two Confederate soldiers who were to suffer death, under order of General Burbridge, for the outrages committed by guerrillas on Henderson a few weeks ago – the shooting of Mr. Rankin, robbing of stores, &c. Before the shooting of the soldiers Hon. Archie Dixon and Mayor Banks telegraphed to Governor Bramlette to use his influence with General Burbridge to have the sentence respited. Governor B. telegraphed to Colonel Harrington to delay until he could hear from General Burbridge. Immediately upon the reception of Governor Bramlette's dispatch General Burbridge sent word to Colonel Harrington to delay no longer the execution of the prisoners. With this positive order, Friday about dusk the sentence was enforced. The young men shot were from the vicinity of Curdville, in this county, and respectively named Powell and Thompson – the first about 25 and the latter 18 years of age. They both died like men. Colonel Harrington is said to have shed tears, when giving the word of command for the prisoners to be shot. The whole affair has cast a deep gloom over this part of the State, and all are fearful the scenes that have been enacted in Missouri will now be inaugurated here, which may God forbid. Early Saturday morning Colonel Harrington, with his command, left for Evansville, and it was feared Colonel Sybert would take some means to inflict injury upon the citizens of Henderson, and their misgivings were not quieted until the following proclamation was issued :

HEADQ'RS SYPERT AND SOERY'S  
CONFEDERATE REGIMENT,  
July 23d, 1864.

*To the Citizens of Henderson :*

On yesterday two Confederate soldiers were shot to death in the streets of your city. They died unjustly. They condemned – their entire command condemned – as earnestly as any citizen of Kentucky, the wounding of Mr. James E. Rankin and the plundering of property in your city. But they are gone – and their murder is another crime added to the damnable catalogue of infamy of the despotism that rules you. We are Confederate soldiers. We fight for the liberties our sires bequeathed us. We have not made, nor will we make, war on citizens and women – let not your people be excited by any further apprehensions that we will disturb the peace of your community by the arrest of Union men – or any interference with them – unless they place themselves in the attitude of combatants. Such conduct would be cowardly, and we scorn it. We are in arms to meet and battle with soldiers – not to tyrannize over citizens and frighten women and children.

We move with our lives in our hands – we are fighting not for booty, but for liberty; to disenthral our loved Southern land from the horrible despotism under which it has bled and suffered so much. We know our duty and we will do it as soldiers and men. Even if what are denominated "Southern Sympathizers," be arrested by the tyrants that lord it over you, we would scorn to retaliate by arresting Union men who had no complicity in the matter: but our retaliation will be upon soldiers.

Let not the non-combatants of your community be further excited by any fear that we will disturb them. All Union men who may have left home on our account, may safely return. In war, soldiers should do the fighting.

The brave sons of our beloved land so far have triumphantly resisted the cruel crusade of Northern Vandals, and we trust in God that she – our "Dixie" – may soon stand forth before the world a recognized Republic – the grave of patriots and the home of freemen.

L. A. SYPERT,  
Col. Commanding C. S. A.  
R. B. L. SOERY,  
Lieutenant Colonel.  
J. WALKER TAYLOR,  
Of Maj. Gen. Buckner's Command, C.S.A.



**History of Henderson County, Kentucky, by Edmund L. Starling**  
**(Henderson, KY, 1887) pp. 547-558:**

**MURDER OF JAMES E. RANKIN**

Of all the horrors of the war, there was no one occurrence more terrible, more frightful, or more atrocious than the history of the one to follow: On the eleventh day of July, 1864, a beautiful Monday afternoon, while the sun was shining in all its glory, and a rainfall, as gentle and brilliant as the sparkling dewdrops, was gladdening the parched earth, a company of desperate outlaws, as if with wings, flew into the city and soon claimed control of every principal street. The grand *entree* was made in First Street, and in the twinkling of an eye, the instrument of the Henderson & Evansville Telegraph Company, located in the second story of the old South Kentuckian building, then standing on the corner of Main and First streets, was completely battered to pieces. After this had been done, a system of thievery was indulged, and never before or since that time has such a reign of terror been witnessed in the city. Desperadoes, most fiendish and horridly uniformed, to add to their natural repulsive appearance, galloped over the streets with pistols in hand and commanded men as they chose, at the mouth of five-shooters cocked and of easy trigger. These devils came unauthorized, for they belonged to neither army. They were robbers and murderers and cared not whose house they entered or whose carcass they punctured with leaden messengers of death. Near on to twilight, four or five of them, headed, as it was said at the time, by one Edmunds, of Hopkins County, who had for years prior to the war, been engaged in hauling tobacco from that county to this city, entered the storehouse of Mr. James E. Rankin, on the corner of Main and Second Streets, and immediately commenced robbing the shelves of silks, ribbons, velvets and many other valuable goods. Not satisfied with this, they took from his cash drawer what small change there was in it. The iron safe was in the office at the rear end of the second story, and this was securely locked and could only be opened by the use of a combination key. This key, as was the custom of Mr. Rankin after locking his safe for the night had been taken to pieces and the parts placed in a box kept in the cash drawer down stairs in the storeroom. In robbing the drawer, the rings of the key were also taken by the robbers. About this time, a villain, who claimed to exercise command, came into the store and peremptorily ordered the men out, and without a murmur, they left the house, mounted their horses and rode away.

Mr. Rankin, thinking perhaps they might return, and not wishing to hold any further communication with them, went to a room in the rear end of the third story. Hardly had he succeeded in shutting the door before the same scoundrel, who had a few minutes before ordered the men out of the storeroom, returned with three or four men – Edmunds one of the number – and called from Mr. Rankin. Mr. John Allin, who was clerking for him at the time, protested his ignorance of his whereabouts, but this was of no avail. One of the gang said, "I know where he is;

follow me.” He then started to the second story and from that he ascended the third flight of steps, and soon found his way to the door of the room in which Mr. Rankin was sitting. Finding him, he was ordered forthwith to proceed below. This he did, of course, and when arriving at his office was ordered to unlock the safe. This he declared impossible unless he could regain the key which he had left in his cash drawer below, but which had been taken away by the first squad who had robbed his house. He then proposed to go down to the drawer and see if the key could be found, and as he started and had descended not more than three steps, one of the men without a word of warning fired, the ball striking him in the back of the neck and ranging down the region of the throat. Not satisfied with this, he followed him and several times hit him over the head and shoulders with the butt of his pistol. Mr. Rankin ran as fast as he could out of the front of his house and into an adjoining store of Holloway & Hopkins, still pursued by this man and his comrade. He halted at the showcase and was leaning with his arm upon it, when the two murderers entered with pistols cocked and pointed at him. At this juncture, William H. Lewis, who was clerking for Holloway & Hopkins and was the only person in charge, rushed between the men and Mr. Rankin, and knocking the pistol aside, begged them for God’s sake, if they were Confederate soldiers and valiant men, not to shoot a man who was then dying from the effects of the first shot. At this, both pistols were lowered and the two men walked out. A physician was summoned, and in as short time as possible Mr. Rankin was removed to the storehouse of B. B. Williams, where he remained until the murderers left town, when he was taken to his own residence on Upper Main Street.

In the safe was a large amount of money belonging to Hugh Tate, and of this the guerrillas knew, for they mentioned the fact. They secured Mr. Rankin’s watch and what money there was in the cash drawer, but failed to get into the safe. After the shooting, the robbers plied their avocation with a reckless indifference, loading their horses with beaver cloths, silks, velvets, ribbons, boots, shoes, blankets, and any other articles attracting their attention. While this squad was robbing Mr. Rankin, others were taking horses and other items of value, and having abundantly supplied themselves, all left the town.

A short time after their departure, a United States gunboat patrolled the river front and threw several shells in the direction taken by the guerrillas, but without doing any damage.

No man then felt safe, for if as pure, noble and good man as James E. Rankin was shot down in cold blood, others felt that they were in greater danger. Excitement became intense, and nothing but the want of a few guns (which could not be had) saved the lives of that squad of inhuman outlaws. To add additional lustre to the memory of Hon. R. T. Glass, be it said that he, of all the men standing around on the streets, was the only one to openly denounce the outlaws. This he did to two of them in person and unhesitatingly announced his willingness to lead or assist in shooting the last one of them from their horses before escape could be possible.

#### A SAD RETRIBUTION.

*From the News, November 24, 1864; – “On Wednesday night, the twentieth inst., Lieutenant Headington, in command of one hundred and fifty troops, (134th Indiana Infantry, one hundred-day men), landed in our city, from Louisville, and immediately threw out pickets around the town, who permitted no one to leave the place without a pass.*

*“These troops brought with them, four Confederate soldiers, two of whom had ventured on their steamer (the Palestine) at Rock Haven and were secured; the other two, Thompson and Powell, by name, had been captured. On the twelfth day of July, 1864, five miles from Owensboro on what was known as the plank road, their company being in Daviess County recruiting, and had that morning met some regular soldiers, (Federal) and some one hundred home guards on Ruff*

Creek, killing eleven and routing the balance. They were returning when Thompson and Powell were cut off from the main body and captured. Thompson and Powell belonged to the command of Captain Dick Yates, a commissioned Confederate officer, who was recently killed in a skirmish near that town. Lieut. Headington had received orders to publicly execute these last two prisoners in our city in retaliation for the atrocious attempt of a gang of guerrilla scoundrels and marauders (but a short time since) to murder in cold blood, Mr. Jas. E. Rankin, one of our most estimable citizens, and for other outrages perpetrated of late in Henderson and vicinity. These two men were selected by Gen. Burbridge to be shot at twelve o'clock on last Thursday, but through the urgent solicitations of many of our prominent Union citizens, the execution was delayed until three o'clock, in order to give time to send to Evansville for a Catholic priest, who could administer religious consolation, both of the doomed ones being Catholics. Mr. John Pernet, of our city, went for and returned with the priest. Hon. Archibald Dixon and Mayor Banks also hastened to Evansville and telegraphed to Gen. Ewing, at Louisville, representing that the act of shooting these two men threatened to ultimate in the destruction of the City of Henderson by bands of guerrillas who now swarm in our vicinity, and urging a request from the leading Union citizens of the town, not to enforce said execution, as it was furthermore averred by some that the two condemned men were regular sworn Confederate soldiers. Whereupon Gen. Ewing promptly telegraphed to Evansville, ordering a suspension of the execution until he could hear from General Burbridge. A military courier was instantly dispatched from Evansville to our city with these instructions. This was a cheering respite for the doomed young men, who had made every preparation to meet their bitter fate. They had called in an artist and had their portraits taken to send to their relatives. One of them (John P. Powell, aged 23), bore up like a man of nerve, but the young (Wm. Thompson, age 18), shed many tears over the near approach of death, both persistently contending that they were no robbers or marauders, but regularly sworn Confederate soldiers.

“Lieutenant Headington had further written instructions to ascertain the several amounts robbed from our merchants and others in the recent guerrilla or robber raids into Henderson, and to assess the full amount *pro rata* from reputed secession sympathizers among us. In conformity to these orders, he held an interview with Mr. C. M. Pennel, the U.S. Deputy Assessor of our city, and asked his assistance. Mr. P. truthfully informed Lieut. H. that the citizens of all political parties in Henderson were living in friendly, social intercourse and harmony, and had no disposition to harass or defraud one another – that all, irrespective of their political convictions, condemned the villainies recently committed by outlaws, without authority from either belligerent force, and that he (P.) being merely a civil officer, would prefer not to assess his neighbors who happened to entertain different politics from himself, as to the best course to be pursued in our national calamities. In short, that he would not point out men to be assessed for the committal of robberies which they could not avoid, and did not countenance. Lieut. H. said his orders were imperative, yet, from what he saw and heard, the people of Henderson had been most grievously maligned by ignorant, designing, or unscrupulous individuals, wherein it had gone forth that they had aided and abetted the inroads and plunderings of the various marauding bands, who have infested this vicinity. But he was an officer of the army, and had no discretionary power in the case – his orders were explicit and must be obeyed. Another Union man was then called in consultation, and it was agreed to select three fair representative Southern Rights men, who should themselves make the assessment on certain citizens, whom they should designate after computing the amount necessary to cover all the losses incurred by our merchants. On inquiry it was found that \$2,700 included all losses, and the assessment was made out, and the parties called upon very promptly gave their checks for the money. These checks were then paid over to those who had been robbed, who, to

their honor be it said, universally to a man refunded the sums to their neighbors and friends, whom they knew to be innocent of any complicity with the robbers. The deceased Mr. Rankin, in this way promptly returned (through one of his sons) \$1,000, which had been assessed in his favor.

“In connection with the name of an amiable gentleman and true Christian, and in order to preclude any suspicion that that lamented citizen had a hand in, or desired, “retaliation” on innocent men, we herewith append a note written by his son and signed by himself, which he forwarded to the commander of the Federal force in our city:

*“Lieut. Headington, Commanding U.S. Forces, Henderson, KY.:*

“Dear Sir: – I have just heard that two guerrillas were to be shot here to-day (Friday), in retaliation for the outrages committed by guerrilla bands in this place. It has pained me greatly to learn this fact, and I would earnestly plead with you to spare the lives of these men. If what the guerrillas have done to me has had any influence in causing this order to be made. I pray you, if possible, to abandon your intention and permit them to live.

J. E. RANKIN

“Henderson, KY., July 21st, 1864.

“But now to take up the thread of events.

“Shortly of three o’clock the pickets stationed at the lower end of the city were heard to fire their pieces, and soon they came hurrying to headquarters (the Court House), with intelligence that a force of guerrillas were advancing upon the city. Orders were hurriedly issued for every soldier to get into the Court House, and all the stragglers and pickets collected in the building. After a brief suspense a flag of truce advanced from the rebels and the bearer delivered a note, which demanded a surrender of our troops to a Confederate force under Col. Syper. Lieut. Headington declined the demand. The flag of truce again returned; the terms proposed were again rejected, and a fight seemed imminent. In a short time, however, the rebel leader, Col. Syper, himself advanced with the flag and had a personal interview with Lieut. H., to whom he exhibited his commission, and said that he wished to avoid the useless shedding of blood, that he had a force sufficient to capture our men, and demanded a quiet surrender – which, of course, was firmly refused. Col. S. then stated that two Confederate soldiers were now held here to be shot in retaliation for crimes committed by an unauthorized party of rascals; that he now held some half-dozen Federal prisoners, and if the proposed execution came off, he would bitterly retaliate by shooting all six of his prisoners, but he hoped for the cause of humanity, that this course would not be persisted in by the Federal officers. In response, Lieut. H. said he was a soldier, bound to obey the orders of his superiors, and could not of his own will alter the decrees of those above him, but for the present, the execution had been delayed. Col. S. then requested that the citizens be notified to leave the city, agreeing to suspend his contemplated attack one hour for that purpose.

“The conference between the two commanders was characterized by a tone of gentlemanly deportment, the parties acting with decorum and dignity, and socially taking a “wee drap” together from the proffered flask of Lieutenant Headington. At the same time they were firm and inveterate opponents.

“In the meantime much excitement prevailed. Squads of men, women and children were striking for the country. Every place of business had been closed on the first intimation of the proximity of the rebels, and our heretofore lively city presented an aspect of the Sabbath. Many stores had been packing up their goods for removal to Evansville and Louisville for several days, and numerous private families had also made their exodus and removed their household effects.

“All this was consequent upon the recent irruptions made upon us by guerillas, and which were about culminating in a public military execution in our city, which would, it was feared, endanger the lives and property of Union citizens.

“Time passed on, and the threatened attack was not made. A courier had been early dispatched to Evansville for reinforcements, or for the presence of a gunboat. Two of the latter arrived late in the evening, one of which threw several shells at a point at the back of the city, where it was surmised the rebel force was located, said to be near Alves’ Springs. At one o’clock that night the little steamer Lou Eaves arrived from Evansville with two hundred of the invalid corps, who patrolled our streets and arrested our night police, but subsequently released them, on finding who they were. These men, finding there was no fight on hand, returned to Evansville before morning.

“On Friday it was ascertained that a force of about three hundred rebels were encamped near the city. Our pickets were again put out and passes required to go through the lines. In the morning of this day three civilians were arrested and confined. Having brought no military stores with him, Lieutenant H. was compelled to quarter his troops on our citizens, who fed all assigned them.

“On Friday afternoon, about five o’clock, eight mounted scouts were sent out to scout the suburbs of the city, to ascertain if any force of rebels hovered near. Frequent communication was held between the land force and gunboat. A force of the Home Guard from Indiana, opposite our city, were called over, and evidently there was some secret movement contemplated. About dusk, when most of our citizens had retired to their homes, the body of troops, fully accoutred, with knapsacks on shoulders, and fixed bayonets, issued from the Court House, having five prisoners in charge, viz: Powell and Thompson, the two Confederates captured at Rock Haven, and Pearman, a citizen of our town (who had talked foolishly when on a drunken spree). They proceeded down First Street and halted within one hundred yards of our office. A small squad then escorted the prisoners to the river bank, and awaited till a skiff put off from the gunboat and communicated with them. While here on the beach, Powell asked the officer in command of his guard, if it was the design to shoot Thompson and himself that evening. (The prisoners having been told before they left the Court House that an attack was expected from the rebels, and that all the prisoners were to be placed under cover of the gunboat.) The officer said he not know, but that some new orders had been received that evening, the nature of which he was ignorant. “If we are to be shot,” said Powell, “we would like to see our Catholic friend, Miss Mary Henderson, and receive a cross from her.” The officer answered that of course such a request would be acceded to.

“In a short time an officer conveyed some word from the main force on the bank, when the sergeant in charge of the prisoners immediately formed six of his men into a hollow square, and Powell and Thompson, their hands still bound, were again marched up the bank to where the balance of the force stood. It was now obvious that a speedy death awaited the two young prisoners.

“Two platoons of detailed men stood apart in the street, with fixed bayonets and loaded muskets, facing a fence which skirted the payment, not over fifteen paces distant. Two chairs about a yard apart stood against the fence, and the prisoners being conducted to these seats, their arms were securely pinioned to the boards of the fence. Powell still was firm and undismayed, but Thompson bewailed his hard fate. Their eyes were bandaged with handkerchiefs. The word was given for one platoon to fire on Powell – twelve men discharged a rattling volley full upon him, ten balls striking – one in the right eye, one near the heart, three nearly together in the right

shoulder, another in his right breast, and four balls entered his pelvis. Groans of anguish echoed to the report of the muskets. The other squad were then ordered to aim for Thompson, and again the deadly bullets went whistling on their work of slaughter. Four balls riddled Thompson – one striking at the right eye, the rest entering his body. There hung, suspended to the fence by ropes, the lifeless bodies of two young men who, but a few moments previous, were in the full vigor of manhood and health. It was a horrible spectacle to those who stood near, and we are credibly informed that Lieutenant Headington averred that it was the most unpleasant duty he ever had to perform. Our citizens universally, so far as we have been able to learn, strenuously opposed this execution in our midst of men who had not participated in any outrage in our city.

“After the shooting the military passed the mutilated corpses over to our citizens, three of whom were Samuel W. Posey, Joe B. Johnston and James B. Evans, and who conveyed them to a building where they were stripped, washed and attired in clean clothing, and placed in neat coffins. Word was then dispatched to their relatives in Daviess County that the bodies were at their disposal.

“Federal soldiers remained in our city until daylight, when they went up to Evansville, on the General Halleck, showing conclusively that they had performed their mission.

“We cannot forbear noticing the kindness bestowed upon these unfortunates, previous to their death, by an estimable Catholic lady, Miss Mary Henderson, and that the last wish the deceased expressed was to be permitted to receive a cross from her hands.

“Retaliation on innocent parties looks like barbarity – like vindictive cruelty. There is nothing Christian about it, and, as for policy, in our opinion, it is the policy of madmen. Where is it to end? If the villains engaged in the shooting of Mr. Rankin could have been caught and shot, or hung, there is no man in our city, but who would have rejoiced. Nay, we are told that the rebel Colonel Sybert had expressed his intention to shoot all such unauthorized scoundrels. But these young men, whose warm blood has dyed our streets, had no hand or part in any deeds of the kind. They were rebels against our Government, taken with arms in their hands; but they were regular sworn soldiers, and condemned the acts of Edmonds and his gang, who had made the murderous onslaught on Mr. Rankin. Let it be remembered, that our citizens are almost totally unarmed – a squad of armed desperadoes dash into the city, take us by surprise, and we have no idea of their numbers – then they commit excesses which are repugnant to all eyes, and again hurry off, and for these acts, the suffering citizens are to be plucked, because they could not help themselves. Most wonderful justice!

“On Saturday morning, after the departure of the Federals, some of our prudent and influential citizens, fearing an inroad from Sybert's command, went out to his camp, to disavow an endorsement of the execution. Early in the evening they returned, bearing the following document, which was soon put in type and distributed to an excited public:

Headquarters Sybert's and Soery's  
CONFEDERATE REGIMENT, July 23d, 1864.

*To the Citizens of Henderson:*

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by the arrest of Union men – or any interference with them, unless they place themselves in the attitude of combatants. Such conduct would be cowardly, and we scorn it. We are in arms to meet and battle with soldiers – not to tyrannize over citizens and frighten women and children.

‘We move with our lives in our hands, and we are fighting not for booty, but for liberty to disenthral our loved Southern land from the horrible despotism under which it has bled and suffered so much. We know our duty, and we will do it as soldiers and men. Even if what are denominated Southern sympathisers, be arrested by the tyrants that lord it over you, we would scorn to retaliate by arresting Union men, who had no complicity in the matter; but our retaliation will be upon soldiers.

‘Let not the non-combatants of your community be further excited by any fear that we will disturb them. All Union men who may have left home on our account, may safely return. In war, soldiers should do the fighting,

‘The brave sons of our beloved land so far have triumphantly resisted the cruel crusade of Northern vandals, and we trust in God that she – our ‘Dixie’ – may soon stand forth before the world, a recognized Republic – the grave of patriots and the home of freemen.

‘L. A. SYPERT, ’

‘Colonel Commanding, C. S. A.

‘R. B. L. SOERY,

‘Lieutenant Colonel.

‘J. WALKER TAYLOR,

‘Of Major General Buckner's Command, C. S. A.’

“The sad finale of our lengthy article is to chronicle the death of Mr. Rankin, who died on Sunday morning last.

“On Friday, his family deemed it advisable to remove him and themselves over the river into Indiana – his physicians and friends flattering themselves that he was recovering from his dangerous wound. On Sunday morning last, at 6 o’clock, he requested his wife to prepare him some ham, while he was partaking of this, she asked him if it “tasted natural.” He replied “yes, it does,” and then swallowed some ice water, which instantly brought on a violent strain of coughing. This cough caused the re-opening or bursting of the wounded blood vessels in his throat, and a rapid stream of blood gushed forth from his mouth and nostrils, staining his person and the bedding with the purple dye of life. Strangulation laid him cold and rigid in death, and the spirit of this zealous christian, kind husband, indulgent father, and worthy citizen took its flight to another and a better world, “where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.” Funeral services were held over his remains on yesterday (Monday) evening, at the Presbyterian Church, of which denomination he had long been a ruling elder. Rev. J. Woodbridge preached his funeral sermon to a large congregation, who felt they had lost one of the best of citizens. Indeed, universal sorrow pervaded our city, and his bereaved family had the sympathy of all.

“Mr. Rankin was fifty-four years of age at his death, and now leaves an afflicted widow and eight children to mourn his loss. But we hope our loss is his gain. He was a Kentuckian, born in Henderson County, where he has passed nearly his whole life. When a youth he acted as salesman in Mr. Pollock’s store, afterwards going into business with a partner (John H. Barrett), and since 1831, has carried on a dry goods business, enjoying an abundant patronage. He was often elected as Trustee for the town, but never aspired to any political station, preferring the quiet sphere of a merchant, and the delights of his domestic fireside.”

The following beautiful poem is taken from the *Freeman’s Journal*.”

"MY BROTHER'S NO MORE."

[Written by a young lady of Owensboro, Kentucky, on the death of her brother, William C. Thompson, who was executed in Henderson, July 22d, 1864.]

Despair in his wild eye a son of Kentucky,  
    Appeared on the banks of the bleak sandy shore;  
Loose in the wind flowed his dark ringlets streaming,  
    And heedless he listened to the dread surges roar;  
Loud rang his voice in wild tones of despairing,  
The time pass'd away with the present comparing,  
And in soul-thrilling strains deeper sorrow declaring,  
    He expressed utter grief and my brother's, no more!

Oh, Kentucky, my country, one son has departed,  
    For tyrants and traitors have stabbed his heart's core;  
Thy daughters have laved in the streams of affliction—  
    Thy patriots have fled, or lie stretched in their gore:  
Ruthless ruffians now prowl thro' thy hamlets forsaken.  
From pale, hungry orphans their last morsel have taken;  
The screams of thy females no pity awaken —  
    Alas! my poor country, my brother's no more!

Brave was his spirit. yet mild as an angel's.  
    His heart wept in anguish the wrongs of the poor;  
To relieve their hard sufferings he braved every danger—  
    The vengeance of tyrants undauntedly bore;  
E'en before him the proud titled villains in power,  
Were seen, though in Ermine, in terror to cower;  
But alas! he is gone, he has fallen—a young flower—  
    They have murdered my Willie, my brother's no more!



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 1 July 1906, p.1:**

**SAD DAY**

Recalled to County Official  
by Wheat Threshing Days.

Forty Two Years Ago Two  
West Louisville Men Shot  
By Order Federal Authorities at Henderson,  
and Remains Taken to Old Home.

**NOBLE ACT OF HAWESVILLE GIRL**

In substance, the following reminiscence of war times was told to the *Inquirer* by a reputable gentleman of Owensboro, who is now a public official:

"Wheat is being threshed and that reminds me that it was wheat threshing time just forty-two years ago, when two young men, William Thompson and Pierman Powell were shot at Henderson by order of federal authorities and brought to the Catholic burying ground at St. Joseph in this county for interment. I remember well that we were out in field threshing wheat when the news reached us. It was about noon that as the end of work for that day. We had been jolly and joking as threshing crowds of those days were, and as they sometimes are now, but our gayety ended quickly. We adjourned work and started towards Henderson to meet the corpses, which were being hauled to St. Joseph in a road wagon. Even this was consideration not often shown to 'rebels' in those trying times, but the privilege of bringing the bodies back to the home of the men for interment was granted through the intervention of ex-Governor Lazarus W. Powell and Archibald Dixon, all of Henderson. We did not go very far before we met the sad, solemn procession, and we all returned with it to the village church, where the bodies were placed and left to lie in state all night and until the burial hour the next day. Men watched all night by the dim light of candles in the old church, which burned down several years ago and the board floor of which was stained for years with some of the blood of the men which dropped from the plain wooden coffins, in which the bodies were placed, just after the fatal shots had been fired. The coffin lids were taken off and all who wished could see faces of their dead neighbors. I shall never forget the impression the sight made on me. Each man had a bullet hole in the skull, near the outer corner of one eye. and I always believed they must have been made with pistol after the men had been killed.

#### **Were West Louisville Men.**

"The two victims were, young men of the West Louisville neighborhood. Powell was a half-brother of William Powell, now of Owensboro, and Thompson was a brother of Mrs. Alex. Wethington, of West Louisville. They were devoted, and openly so, the cause of the South, and this was the offense for which they were arrested and shot by order of the union authorities. The funeral was attended by a great concourse of people, and the story of their tragic death is often recounted by those who know of it. Their graves are well marked by atones in the St. Alphonsus cemetery and the epitaphs tell where why and how they died. The funeral was in marked contrast to the occasion soon after the breaking out of the war, when there was a gathering at the same place to see a crowd of young men go off to link fortunes with the Confederacy. That was a joyous, hopeful gathering fand prayers for success were said on every side.

"I remember well that many young women were present and in their midst and most prominent of all, was Miss Lizzie Haar, of Hawesville, who was then teaching our neighborhood school. She gave a cue in plucking the flowers from her hat and giving them to the young fellows, who volunteered to help the South, which her companions quickly followed and many freely decorated hats were soon bereft of all their flowers.

"Oh, yes, I remember well those stirring and exciting times and they are always recalled to my mind when harvest time. comes round."



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 24 May 1914, p.5B:**

Daughters of the Confederacy  
Desire Aid in Noble Cause

Living side by side in the quiet community of St. Joseph's of this county are two neglected graves of Confederate soldiers martyred for the cause they loved and for no other reasons than they were shot by order of Stephen Burbridge the military general of Kentucky, than whom no man was more feared and abhorred. Speak only good of the dead and if any man knows ought of good – let him speak and it will be recorded of him. These men Pierman Powell and J. F. Thompson, were captured in Owensboro and put in the old jail then on the southeast corner of the courthouse yard.

The order came that two Confederate soldiers were to be, shot and to these two – our boys – fell the solemn lot. They were taken to Henderson and shot and their bodies brought back to us for burial.

A modest marker with their short history inscribed was placed at their graves but it has fallen and is broken and unkept. St. Joseph's is a beautiful but isolated spot and these two graves, our sacred charges, have been long neglected. The Daughters of the Confederacy, with the help of those who knew them are going to build up and sod the graves, renew the stone and continue the memory of our two brave boys in the little gray jacket and cap who gave up their lives in the flower of manhood, and honor them in a fitting tribute, to their bravery and love.

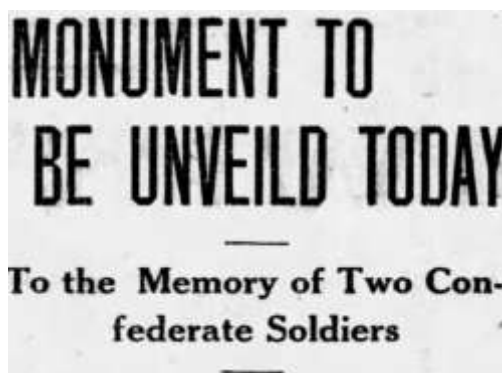
There are many in this county who knew these men and their history, who would rejoice in being granted the privilege of helping in this work of love and the daughters would gladly welcome any help in this good work.

A subscription list is in the hands of Mrs. W. A. Sutherland as any gift or tribute may be left at the Adams Express office and will be dedicated to this use.

U. D. C., SECRETARY.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 15 November 1914, p.3:**



**SHOT TO DEATH BY ORDERS OF MILITARY GOVERNOR**

**SERVICES AT ST. JOSEPH**

**Under the Auspices of John C. Breckinridge Chapter of U. D. C.**

The unveiling of a monument in the Catholic cemetery near St. Joseph's in memory of two Confederate soldiers, William Thompson and Perryman Powell, will take place at 2 o'clock this afternoon, under auspices of the John C. Breckinridge chapter, U. D. C. The money for monument was contributed. by a number of Owensboro veterans friends and friends. Dr. H. D. Rodman and Mr. I. P. Barnard, of Louisville, large contributors.

William Thompson and Perryman Powell were shot July 22, 1864, at Henderson, Ky., by order of Steven A. Burbridge, then military governor of Kentucky. Burbridge was a great tyrant. Under his orders, only these two men were shot but Smith in his history of Kentucky says that the two Confederate soldiers were shot at Russellville: four at Pleasureville; three were shot at Williamstown; two at Bloomfield; two at Franklin, four in Jeffersontown, ten at Munfordsville, three near Bloomfield in Nelson county; two were hanged by order of Burbridge at Lexington; six were shot to death in Green county and four murdered at Brandenburg, whom was Frank Holmes, of Hawesville. Mr. Holmes is an uncle Mrs. J. W. McCulloch. of Owensboro. Four were shot at Frankfort and four at Midway. In nearly county of the state Burbridge Confederate soldiers shot without any trial, and regardless of the fact as to whether or not they had been guilty of any violation of any civil military law.

Powell and Thompson were captured and were made prisoners of war at Louisville. Burbridge directed that they should be taken Henderson and shot to death. The young men had no trial, they had violated no law, but were arbitrarily put to death under the orders Gen. Burbridge. The tyranny of Burbridge and his blood thirsty career in this state made him so odious among all fairminded people that he was forced to leave the state at the close of the war. He went to Philadelphia where he spent the remainder of his life. He never ventured to return to Kentucky to the day of his death.

The career of Burbridge is the bloodiest chapter in Kentucky's history.

Capt. W. T. Ellis, who is the principal speaker this afternoon, has several letters written by young Thompson to his mother and father, in which the young hero tells that he is to be shot at Henderson. The following is the program to be observed today:

Song, My Maryland; the Girls of St. Joseph's.

Address, Capt. W. T. Ellis.

Song, Tenting in the Old Camp Grounds.

Address, Mrs. J. B. LaRue.

Unveiling of the monument by little Misses Delia Hudson and Alice Seigel.

Song, The Vacant Chair.

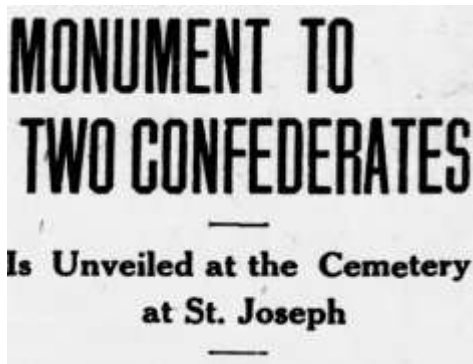
Acceptance of marker by Father Whalen.

Benediction, Mr. Theodore Levy.

Taps, Mr. Yewell Haskins.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 17 November 1914, p.2:**



VERY APPROPRIATE EXERCISES ARE HELD  
TRIBUTES ARE PAID HEROES

Soldiers Shot to Death By Order of Military Governor of Kentucky.

Appropriate and beautiful exercises were held Sunday for the unveiling of a monument, in the cemetery at Mt. St. Joseph's, in memory of two Confederate soldiers, William Thomson and Perryman Powell. The affair was under the auspices of members of the John C. Breckenridge Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and a large number of the daughters, was present on Sunday, as well as many others from Owensboro, and the surrounding neighborhoods.

The principal address of the afternoon was made by Capt. W. T. Ellis, who dwelt on the injustice of the deaths of the two soldiers, shot by order of Steven A. Burbridge, then military governor of Kentucky. Capt. Ellis read two very touching letters written by the soldiers to their parents shortly before their executions.

Mrs. J. B. LaRue also made an interesting address, on the great good accomplished by various chapters of the U. D. C. throughout the United States. Mrs. LaRue made especial reference to the beautiful monument recently dedicated by President Wilson. in Arlington, the National cemetery.

The monument was then unveiled by little Misses Alice Seigel and Delia Hudson, and accepted by Father Whalen, pastor at St. Joseph's in a short. impressive, speech. Father Whalen particular reference to the unequalled bravery and courage, exhibited by Confederate soldiers in the Civil War. Several appropriate were rendered by the girls of Mt. St. Joseph's, and after benediction pronounced by Mr. Theodore Levy, taps was sounded by Mr. Yewell Haskins.



**Owensboro Star, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 20 November 1968, p.1:**



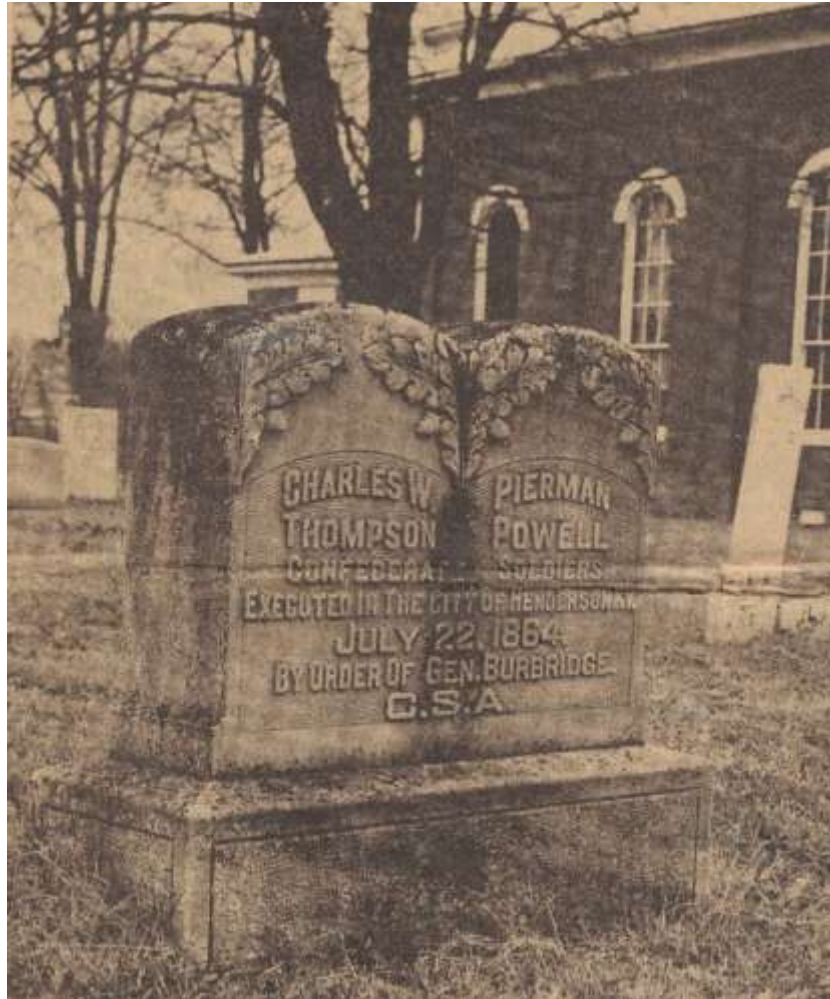
By Ralph Lewis, Owensboro Star

Stories of the Civil War never fail to catch the fancies and stretch the imaginations of history buffs.

The following tale, not told too often, is one of great tragedy involving two young men who were born in nearby Curdsville, Kentucky, and who now lie side by side in the cemetery at St. Alphonsus Church, Mt. St. Joseph. The graves are located a few feet from the front steps of the church.

Many historians have reported that life in western Kentucky was cheap during the Civil War. Homes were left defenseless since guns and ammunition had been seized by the first side to occupy an area. Marauding bands of guerrillas looted, burned, and killed for the sheer pleasure of it, and a day seldom passed without three or four innocent citizens being shot down in cold blood.

In order to stop such forays and wanton murder in Henderson, Kentucky, Union General Stephen G. Burbridge, commanding the Military Department of Kentucky, issued his infamous 'General Order Number Eight' the death knell for hapless Confederate soldiers captured in the vicinity of such outrages.



This moss-covered Gravestone so infuriated Union General Stephen G. Burbridge that he tried for years, without results, to have the letters (CSA) which he despised, removed. The marker was placed over the side-by-side graves of Charles W. Thompson and Pierman Powell, two Confederate soldiers from Curdsville, Kentucky, who were ruthlessly executed by order of General Burbridge on July 22, 1864 in Henderson, Kentucky. (Photo by Ralph Lewis)

Charles W. Thompson, aged 18, and Pierman Powell, 23 were unfortunate in that they were captured on the twelfth day of July, 1864, five miles from Owensboro on what was then known as the plank road while their company was recruiting in Daviess County. The company had run into a body of Union soldiers and a group of home guards, which had resulted in the two young men being separated from the main group and eventually captured. Both were taken to Henderson.

The commander of the Union forces in that city had just received orders to execute publicly any Confederate soldiers captured, in retaliation for the attempt of a band of guerrillas to murder, in cold blood, Mr. James E. Rankin, one of Henderson's most prominent citizens.

The severely wounded Mr. Rankin, hearing of the order of execution, had written a note to the Union forces occupying Henderson, to spare the lives of the two young men but the plea was ignored.

On the evening of Friday, July 22, when most of the citizens of Henderson had retired to their homes, a body of Union troops marched Powell and Thompson to the Ohio River edge on Front Street. Suspecting they were to be executed, both men, Roman Catholics, asked for rosaries. The request was granted.

An accurate account of moments leading up to the actual execution, reads: "Two platoons of detailed men stood apart, with fixed bayonets and loaded muskets, facing a fence which skirted the pavement, not over fifteen paces distant. Two chairs about a yard apart stood against the fence, and the prisoners were conducted to these seats, their arms then securely pinioned to the boards of the fence. Their eyes were bandaged with handkerchiefs, and the word was given for one platoon to fire on Powell and the other to aim for Thompson." In this fashion, two healthy young men paid the supreme sacrifice for a crime they had not committed, and an ironical feature of the story is that Mr. Rankin, on the road to recovery, actually strangled to death on a piece of Kentucky ham prepared by his loving wife.

After the execution of Powell and Thompson, the military passed the two corpses of the young men to the citizens of Henderson and the bodies were then dispatched to relatives in Daviess County.

The squad of executioners were members of the 134th Indiana Infantry under the command of a Lt. Headington.

General Stephen G. Burbridge was responsible for more such executions in Henderson. In November of the same year six men were placed before a firing squad and this time the victims were forced to sit on their coffins while they were shot.

Historians say that General Burbridge moved to Calhoun Kentucky, at the close of the war, and that feelings ran so high against the 'gentlemen and officer' that he eventually moved to Louisville, where, after a brief stay, he was forced to move to Cincinnati, Ohio, where citizens better understood the man's reasoning.

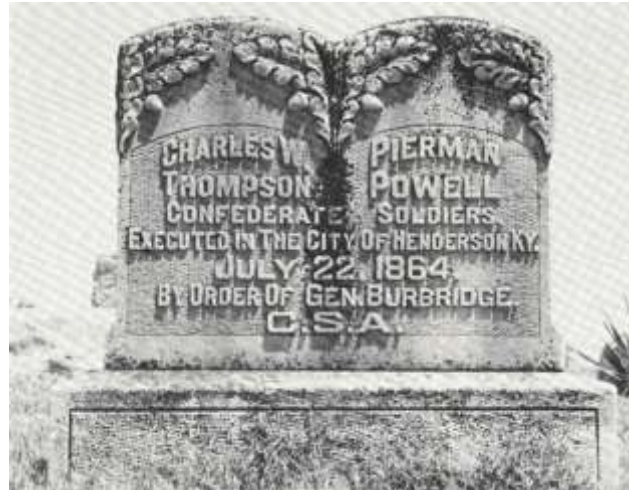
While the monument was being prepared for the graves of Charles Thompson and Pierman Powell, friends and relatives of the pair, aware of Burbridge's intense hatred for the Confederate cause had the following carved by the stonemason: "By order of General Burbridge, CSA." It is said that this act caused the Union General great moments of anguish and frustration and that the 'gentlemen' tried unsuccessfully, for many years afterward to have the letters CSA, removed.



**Owensboro: The City on the Yellow Banks, Lee A. & Aloma W. Dew,**  
**(Bowling Green, KY: Rivendell Publications, 1988) pp.55 & 60-61:**

From W. J. Davis, (Ed.), Partisan Rangers of the Confederate States Army. (Louisville, 1904), 309. Thompson, aged 18, and Powell, 23, were executed by firing squad by orders of Union Gen. Stephen Burbridge in retaliation for a Confederate guerrilla raid in nearby Henderson in which a leading citizen, James E. Rankin, was mortally wounded. Thompson and Powell were

regular Confederate soldiers and were not involved in the Henderson raid, but were used as an example to serve as a deterrent to such activities. Their grave is in St. Alphonsus Cemetery at St. Joseph. Burbridge's atrocities throughout Kentucky made him hated by Union and Confederate supporters alike. He was the only Kentucky general who feared to return to his home state after the War.



The execution of two young Confederates from Daviess County in July 1864 made contemptible the name of General Stephen Burbridge and brought sadness to the hearts of many in Owensboro. Pierman Powell, twenty-three, and Charles W. Thompson, eighteen, were regular Confederate soldiers who had become separated from their regiment and captured. Powell and Thompson's regiment had been recruiting in Daviess County when they met Union soldiers and a skirmish ensued. The prisoners were taken first to Louisville to a military prison, then to Henderson, where they were ordered executed by a firing squad. Burbridge ordered the executions as an example in retaliation for the mortal wounding of one of Henderson's leading citizens, James E. Rankin, and the looting of the town by guerrillas. It must be emphasized that these two men were regular Confederate troops, not guerrillas, and they had nothing to do with the incident for which they were to be punished. Burbridge felt such an extreme measure would serve as an example and a deterrent. He had issued an order that whenever an unarmed Union citizen was murdered, four guerrillas would be selected from prisoners and publicly shot to death near the scene of the crime. The people of Henderson petitioned that the execution be stopped, but to no avail. Even Governor Thomas Bramlette sent a plea for delay, which Burbridge ignored.

"Powell bore up like a man of nerve, but the younger (Thompson) shed many tears near the approach of death. . ." a witness reported. The two young men were blindfolded with handkerchiefs and set in chairs lined against a fence. Powell stoically awaited the fatal volley as Thompson sobbed and pleaded for clemency. Their final wish was to receive a cross from the hands of their Catholic friend, Miss Mary Henderson. The request was granted; then within minutes, two young men in their prime were dead. The townspeople were outraged at the execution. "Retaliation on innocent parties looks like barbarity – like vindictive cruelty – where is it to end?" wrote Henderson Edmund Starling of the senseless wasting of the two men. This scene was repeated through the state, earning a scornful reputation for Burbridge, who was the only high-ranking officer from Kentucky on either side who feared to return to his home state after the end of the war.



**The Kentucky Encyclopedia, John E. Kleber, editor,  
(Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992) p.142:**

STEPHEN GANO BURBRIDGE

By Aloma Williams Dew

Stephen Gano Burbridge, a Civil War military commander of Kentucky, was born on August 19, 1831, in Georgetown, Kentucky, the son of Robert and Elizabeth (Barnes) Burbridge. He was educated at Georgetown College and Frankfort Military Institute. Burbridge was a lawyer who at the outbreak of the Civil War owned a large plantation in Logan County and helped raise the 26th Kentucky Infantry. He was commissioned colonel on August 27, 1861.

Burbridge distinguished himself at Shiloh and was made brigadier general of volunteers on June 9, 1862. When Braxton Bragg invaded in 1862, Burbridge was sent to Kentucky and placed in command of federal troops in the state. He participated in the expedition sent against Vicksburg and was one of the first federal officers to enter Port Gibson, Mississippi, before laying siege to Vicksburg. For "gallant and distinguished services" in the repulse of John Hunt Morgan's June 12, 1864, invasion of Cynthiana, he was brevetted major general of volunteers on July 4, 1864, and received the thanks of President Abraham Lincoln. On August 7, 1864, he was placed in command of the Military District of Kentucky.

As military commander, Burbridge had the power to invoke martial law in the state. He was overzealous and antagonized much of the state. His job was to enforce the congressional act of 1864 that gave military courts jurisdiction over marauding guerrillas, and to uphold President Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. Burbridge was responsible for the infamous retaliation policy set forth in his Order No. 59, which commanded that four guerrilla prisoners be shot for each Union man killed. More than fifty executions resulted from this order, earning its author the epithet "Butcher" Bur-ridge. Some who were executed were Confederate prisoners of war. Burbridge later ruled that any Confederate sympathizer within five miles of a guerrilla raid was subject to arrest and banishment. His order on October 26, 1864, to shoot guerrillas on sight stirred up even more opposition. Burbridge also arrested several newspaper editors for treason and banished them to the Confederacy because of their criticism of Lincoln and of the war. Lincoln intervened in at least two of these cases on the ground that criticism of him did not constitute treason.

Burbridge was a part of the so-called Great Hog Swindle of 1864. He ordered that all surplus hogs in Kentucky be sold to the U.S. government and prohibited the shipment of hogs out of the state without a special permit. Lincoln reopened the markets at the end of November after a storm of protest over claims that Kentucky farmers had been cheated out of more than \$300,000. Efforts to remove Burbridge by many people, including Gov. Thomas Bramlette (1863-67), finally succeeded in February 1865, when Gen. John PALMER was named military commander. The Louisville Journal summed up many Kentuckians' feelings: "Thank God and President Lincoln." Burbridge resigned from the army on December 1, 1865, and left Kentucky. He moved to Brooklyn, New York, where he died on November 30, 1894.



Stephen Gano Burbridge  
(1831-1894)

See also: "Gen. Stephen Gano Burbridge's Command in Kentucky", by Louis De Falaise, The Register (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, Vol. 69, No. 2, April 1971) pp.101-127; "Stephen Gano Burbridge, Dictionary of American Biography (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, Vol. III, 1929) pp.270-271.

**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 9 November 1992, pp.1C & 2C:**

## Union general held region in grip of iron

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

In a common grave a dozen or so steps from St. Alphonsus Catholic Church in St. Joseph lie the remains of two veterans of America's most brutal war.

Charles W. Thompson and Pierman Powell, Southerners say, were martyrs to the Lost Cause.

History says two Confederates were executed by a Union firing squad in Henderson on July 22, 1864. But tradition is stronger than history. And it says the men were murdered.

As America honors its war dead this week, Thompson and Powell are among the forgotten. Their war was too many years ago.

But for generations, their tombstone stood as an accusation against Stephen G. Burbridge, Logan County farmer turned Union general – the man Kentuckians referred to simply as "The Butcher."

In his book "At War With Ourselves," Arthur C. Truman Jr. of Owensboro says Burbridge was a lieutenant colonel when he organized the 26th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry in Owensboro in the late summer of 1861.

He quickly established a reputation as a stern and harsh commander, Truman says.

Burbridge advanced rapidly, rising to the rank of major general and being named commander of the Military District of Kentucky on Feb. 5, 1864.

Kentuckians blamed Burbridge for pushing through the Congressional Act of July 2, 1864, that gave military courts jurisdiction over guerrilla marauders and for Lincoln's July 5 imposition of martial law in Kentucky.

The man whose name would live in infamy in his native state told Kentuckians: "It is treason to criticize the federal government. And for every depredation committed upon Union men, I will retaliate three-fold upon copperheads and rebel sympathizers in the vicinity."

Soon after Burbridge issued that edict, Hubby Edmondson, a guerrilla from either Hopkins or Webster County, rode into Henderson and shot James E. Rankin, critically wounding him, according to newspaper accounts.

Reports said he also took \$400 in cash, a \$300 gold watch and \$200 worth of dry goods.

Word in Henderson said Burbridge had ordered the death of four guerrilla prisoners for the death of any federal soldier.

Since Rankin didn't die, stories said, and wasn't a Union soldier, only two men – selected at random – were ordered to the firing squad.

The two chosen were Powell, whose age is listed as 23 and 25 in various accounts, and Thompson, 18. But they were Confederate prisoners of war, not guerrillas.

Truman says the two had been involved in a skirmish with Union troops in Daviess County. They were taken prisoner and lodged in the Henderson County Jail, he says.

When Burbridge's military court ordered their execution by firing squad, two Henderson residents telegraphed the governor, asking for a stay of execution.

Gov. Thomas Bramlette ordered the Union commander of Henderson to stay the execution until he could confer with Burbridge. But Burbridge immediately wired Henderson with orders to get on with the execution.

On Friday morning, July 22, Col. L.A. Sybert, commander of Confederate forces in the area, sent a flag of truce to Henderson, demanding the surrender of Union troops there.

The Union commander refused.

Sybert gave the town one hour to evacuate its women and children before he attacked in force.

But Sybert had no force. It was a last-ditch ploy to save the men.

About dusk, when it was evident that no attack was coming, Union soldiers marched Powell and Thompson out and stood them before a firing squad.

The people of Henderson were aghast. Not only was the execution of innocent men wrong, they also feared the retaliation that might follow.

Reports from Henderson said the Union commander, a Col. Harrington, had tears in his eyes when he gave the order to fire. However, Truman's book says the commander was Col. Cicero Maxwell and makes no mention of tears.

When the men were dead, former Gov. Lazarus W. Powell and Archie Dixon of Henderson secured the release of the bodies.

Old newspapers say wheat threshers were at work in the fields around West Louisville the next afternoon when word came of the deaths of their neighbors.

The men dropped their work and started walking down the road toward Henderson. When they met the wagon with the coffins, they followed it back to St. Alphonsus Church, where neighbors kept vigil and wept silently by candlelight throughout the night.

It was said that the blood of the slain rebels ran through the wooden coffins and stained the floor of the old church. They say the stains were still visible when the first St. Alphonsus church burned in 1870.

On the morning after the executions, Union troops hastily withdrew from Henderson to Evansville. Terror gripped Henderson as it lay unprotected from the wrath of the Confederates. Many people fled the city on steamboats.

But Sybert sent assurances that no harm would come to the town. "Yesterday two Confederate soldiers were shot to death in the streets of your city," he wrote. "They died unjustly.

"They condemned – their entire command condemned – as earnestly as any citizen of Kentucky, the wounding of James E. Rankin and the plundering of property in your city. But they are gone and their murder is another crime added to the damnable catalogue of infamy of the despotism that rules you.

"We are Confederate soldiers. We fight for the liberties our sires bequeathed us. We have not made, nor will we make, war on citizens and women. . . ."

The uproar spread across the state.

The governor and the legislature pleaded with Lincoln to remove "the Butcher" from a state that had not seceded from the Union.

When Burbridge was replaced by Maj. Gen. John M. Palmer in February 1865, the Louisville Journal wrote: "Thank God and President Lincoln."

Truman's book says: "General Burbridge probably did more to damage the creditability of the U.S. government in our area than any other individual."

After the war, Truman says, Burbridge was continually harassed by Kentuckians sympathetic to the Confederate cause.

He later moved to Cincinnati and formed a business with Lt. Col. C.A. Wood of the 1st Indiana Cavalry.

The two purchased a surplus gunboat and began buying, selling and trading up and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, Truman says.

But tombstones like those of Thompson and Powell – "Executed in the City of Henderson by Order of Gen. Burbridge," it reads – meant Burbridge could never go home again.



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

Daviess County Bicentennial Chronology:  
200 Historical Events – By Jerry Long

Page 9:

1864, 7-22 Two Daviess County Confederate soldiers, Charles W. Thompson & Pierman Powell, were executed in Henderson in retaliation for Rebel raids. Both were buried at St. Alphonsus Catholic Church Cemetery in western Daviess County.

Page 63:

The very worst times of the Civil War came to the doorsteps of civilians in Daviess County in June 1864 when General Stephen Burbridge, called "The Butcher," was appointed the new Union Commandant of Kentucky. He was given command over Kentucky to deal with the growing problem of Confederate guerrilla raids. During the next six months, Burbridge's heavy-handed administration of military and civilian affairs in the state would reach into every town and village in western Kentucky, arousing Unionists and Southern sympathizers to a new peak of frustration and anger.

The execution of two young Confederates from Daviess County in July 1864, made contemptible the name of Burbridge. When several civilians and Federal soldiers were killed by gangs of rebel marauders, Burbridge retaliated with what became his infamous General Order 59 which stated that wherever an unarmed Union citizen was murdered, four guerillas would be executed for each Unionist slain. It also said that rebel sympathizers living within five miles of attacks on Union supporters would be arrested as public enemies and sent beyond the limits of the U.S.

On July 12, Charles W. Thompson, 18, and John Pierman Powell, 23, both from the Curdsville area, were captured by Union soldiers and Home Guards five miles from Owensboro. They were taken to Henderson where they were executed by firing squad on July 22 in retaliation for the murder of Colonel James Poole. Thompson and Powell were regular troops, not guerrillas, and had nothing to do with the incident for which they were punished. Burbridge ordered the execution as a deterrent even though leading Henderson citizens wrote asking him to revoke the order, and even Governor Thomas Bramlette sent a plea for delay which Burbridge ignored. Colonel Lee Sybert, commander of the 101 Kentucky Partisan Rangers, CSA, issued a statement deploring the action and assuring that "We are Confederate soldiers. We fight for the liberties of our sires bequeathed us. We have not made, nor will we make, war on citizens and women." The statement was also signed by Major J. Walker Taylor of Daviess County, a member of Sybert's staff.

The bodies were brought home to Daviess County, and buried at St. Alphonsus Cemetery at St. Joseph. As a result of this incident, Confederate soldiers in Union prison camps in Kentucky, who had not been involved in guerrilla activity, were picked almost randomly for executions and all Kentuckians were appalled. About 50 prisoners were executed throughout the state under Burbridge's order.





The Thompson and Powell Martyrs Monument is one of 62 monuments related to the Civil War in Kentucky that was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 17, 1997. The monument is in the St. Alphonsus Catholic Church Cemetery at Mount St. Joseph in Daviess County, KY. In above picture the monument is just off the upper edge of the sidewalk.

