

William Joseph Lucas

(1835-1884)

Died in the Line of Duty

By Jerry Long
c.2025



Grave of W. J. Lucas, born 5 August 1835, died 14 July 1884, Section A, Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY. Also inscribed on monument are the names of his wife, Mildred S., and three of their children – Forris F., Regina B. & Annie B. Lucas



“Daviess County Bicentennial Chronology: 200 Historical Events”, by Jerry Long, Daviess County, Kentucky, 1815-2015: Celebrating Our Heritage, Daviess County Bicentennial Committee (Evansville, IN: M. T. Publishing Company, Inc., 2015) p.11:

- 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.
- 1884, 8-4 Mildred Summers Lucas was elected Daviess County Jailer. On 13 July 1884 her husband, William J. Lucas, Daviess County Jailer was shot to death while trying to protect a prisoner. She was appointed to fill his unexpired term and in the following general election was elected to the position. Her election was contested and in December 1885 the Court of Appeals ruled that under the state constitution of that day she was ineligible to hold the office. She was the first woman in Kentucky to be elected county jailer and the first to hold a publicly elected office in Daviess County.



History of Daviess County, Kentucky
(Chicago, IL: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1883), pp.869-870:

W. J. Lucas, jailer, was born in St. Mary's County, Md., a son of William and Alice (Sparks) Lucas. Soon after his birth they removed to Virginia. His parents both died when he was very young, and at an early age he was apprenticed to the carriage maker's trade. He afterward learned the painter's trade. At the outbreaking of the late war he was one of the first to enlist in the Confederate service, remaining in the service until the close of the war. He enlisted as a private and was promoted to Lieutenant. During his service as a soldier he acted as a scout and spy, and was entrusted with many offices and duties that required courage and shrewdness. In all instances he performed his duties with perfect satisfaction. At one time he captured his own brother Luther W. Lucas, who was in the Federal service. Mr. W. J. Lucas was wounded, a bullet passing through his left cheek and lodging in his windpipe, and for a time his life was despaired of. In 1872 he came to Owensboro and worked at the painter's trade until 1882 when he was elected to his present position. He was married to Mildred Summers, Oct. 4, 1865. She was born in Fairfax County, Va., and is a daughter of Wm F. and Mariana (Johnson) Summers. Mr. and Mrs. Lucas have six children – Thomas M., A. Blanch, G. Summers, Forrest F., Regina B. and Anna B.



Messenger & Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 9 January 1878, p.3:

Mr. W. J. Lucas, candidate for Doorkeeper of the House, ran a good race, but he was defeated. He says they didn't tote fair with him, else he'd come out first. The people of this community, regardless of party, regret that he was not more lucky.

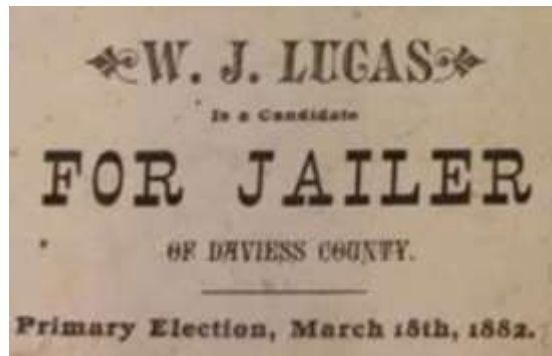


Owensboro Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 22 February 1878, p.5:

To the People of Daviess County.

Fellow *Citizens* – I have concluded to make the race for Jailer of Daviess county. I am convinced that a large majority of the people of Daviess county are opposed to conventions and primary elections, and I believe that the people and not the politicians, should determine who shall be Jailer. Being a mechanic without means, I don't feel financially able to make the race twice for the same office in one year, as I am compelled to work at my trade a greater portion of my time to support my family. I have been a lifelong Democrat, served four years in the Confederate army, fighting for what I believed to be my constitutional rights – and have always cherished the good old Democratic principles, of free trade and sailors' rights and full civil and religious liberties, and will continue to do so until I die. I wish to make this race purely upon my merits, with malice toward none and charity for all. Let the whole people say who shall be the Jailer. For my part, I am a candidate until the polls close on the first Monday, the fifth day of August, Anno Domini, 1878. Respectfully, & c.,
W. J. Lucas

[Note: W. J. Lucas in the election for jailer of Daviess County on Monday 5 August 1878 lost to Elisha Adams.]



campaign card

[Note: William J. Lucas at the Democratic primary on 18 March 1882 was selected candidate for jailer of Daviess County. He was elected jailer of Daviess County on Monday, 7 August 1882. He received 2,343 votes and his opponent, Gibson, received 114.]



Daviess County, KY Order Book M, p.73:

County court of 29 August 1882:

W. J. Lucas this day produced to court a certificate of his election to the office of Jailer of Daviess County at the August election for 1882, which certificate is ordered to be filed, and on motion of said Lucas it is ordered that he be permitted to qualify as Jailer as aforesaid. Whereupon

he took oath, required by the constitution and laws of the State of Kentucky, and executed bond to the commonwealth with T. J. Monarch as surety. Conditioned according to law, which bond is approved by the court.
H. W. Scott, Judge



Messenger & Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 6 September 1882, p.3:

Mr. Lucas, the new jailer, has been sworn in, and has entered into the discharge of his duties. One of first things he did was to remove the grass and weeds from about the curbing, around the court-house yard, which is highly commendable. Now for that paint on the jail, brother Lucas.



Semi-Weekly 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.

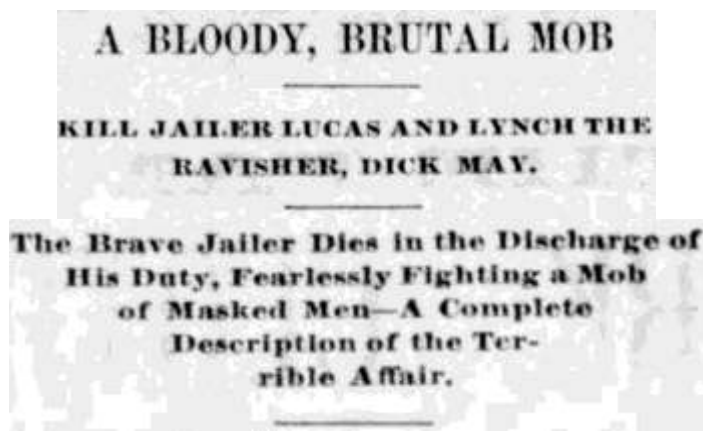


Register of Interments at Elmwood Cemetery
For the years of 1877-1885 and 1900-1902,
Original register in the Kentucky Room,
Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY

pages – 13a-13b:	name – W. J. Lucas
died – 14 July 1884	date of internment – 15 July 1884
nativity – Virginia	cause of death – killed by mob at jail
remarks – section A, lot 51	



Semi-Weekly 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.

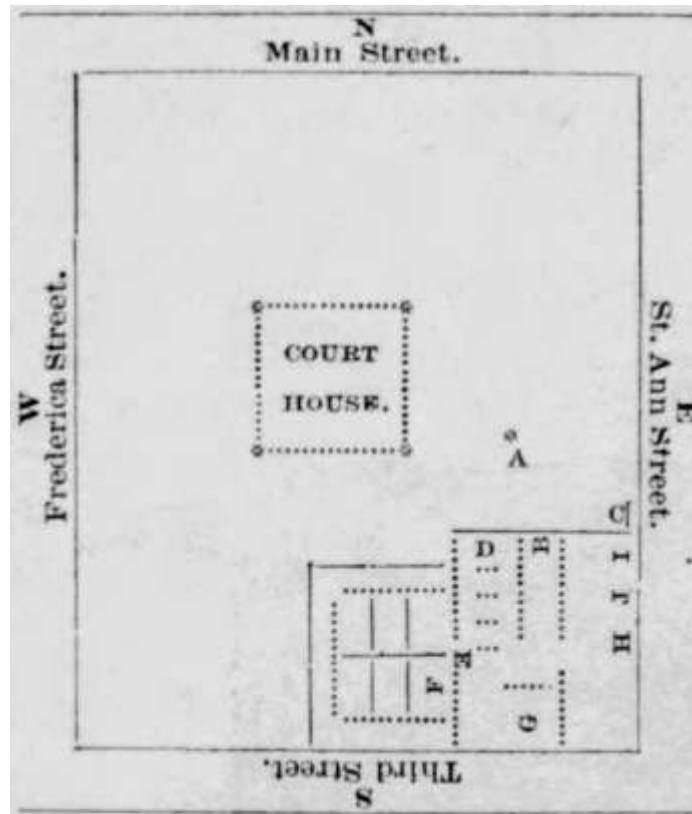
Dr. Todd found that Mr. Lucas had received a wound in the right breast, about three inches above the nipple, the ball ranging to the left. Internal bleeding had set in, and he saw that the wound would prove fatal. He turned to the MESSENGER'S representative and said at once that there was no hope. He 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.

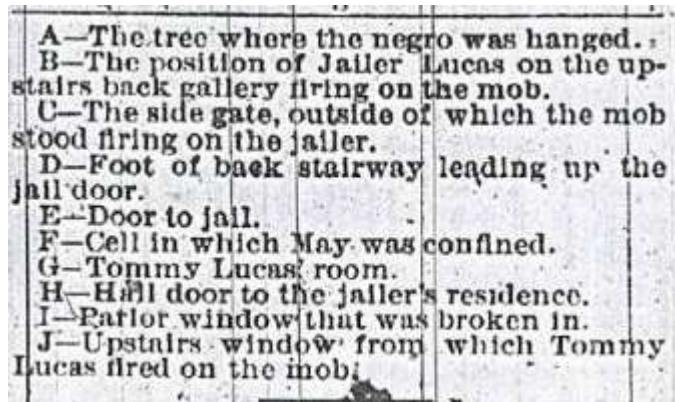
THE ACTION OF LUCAS.

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





- A. The tree where the negro was hanged.
- B. The position of Jailer Lucas on the upstairs back gallery firing on the mob.
- C. The side gate, outside of which the mob stood firing on the jailer.
- D. Foot of back stairway leading up the jail door.
- E. Door to Jail.
- F. Cell in which May was confined.
- G. Tommy Lucas' room.
- H. Hall door to the Jailer's residence.
- I. Parlor window that was broken in.
- J. 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, 1866, 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.

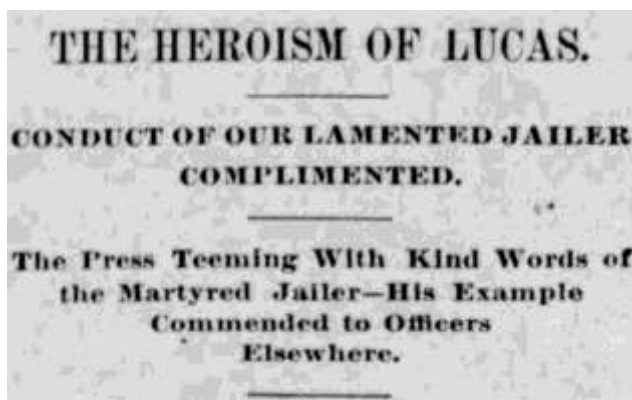
The county judge attempted to telegraph to the Governor for an order to bring out the Monarch Rifles to protect the city from the riot that seemed impending, but the operator failed to

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.



Semi-Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 18 July 1884, p.1:



[Courier -Journal.]

W. J. Lucas, jailer of Daviess county, who died Sunday night in the strict performance of his duty, leaves an example of zeal and devotion which should inspire us to renewed efforts to restore law and order to Kentucky; to redeem the State from blood-guiltiness; to restrain the passions the multitude and punish the instigators of the mob.

He falls, another victim to the laxity of law; to the leniency and toleration with which crime is treated; to perverted interpretation of the written statutes, which have made justice, swift and severe, almost impossible.

It is idle for Kentuckians longer to satisfy themselves with mere denunciation of the mob; we must go back of it and learn what leads to such frequent outbreaks. They are not to be excused; they are not to be tolerated; the mob and society are irreconcilable, implacable opponents. The one destroys the other. The principles of one antagonize and overthrow the other. The conflict is irrepressible; either the mob must be suppressed, or society will disintegrate and anarchy prevail.

We must have a remedy, but it is useless and more than useless to treat mere superficial indications; we must go to the root of the disease, and it will be found in the fact that the courts of this Commonwealth have frittered away and quibbled the chief defenses of the people. By their delays and judgments, by their toleration of inconsistent pleas, by their indifference to public safety they have almost abolished capital punishment, and have made the most noted criminals the most distinguished and most privileged citizens of the state.

The conviction that the higher crimes can not be punished in Kentucky has taken firm hold on the minds of our people; each year this conviction is strengthened, and the result is, that when any community is shocked by a grave and unusual crime, the passions of the people are aroused, and under the plausible plea of self-protection an appeal is made to Judge Lynch, in whose court

only the verdict of guilty is ever rendered, and from whose sentence not even a Governor's pardon avails.

Yet plausible though the reasons for such course may seem, they cannot justify it on any ground of justice or expediency. A mob is not only a strong condemnation of the mal-administration of laws – it is a disgrace to any community, a reflection alike on its courage and its intelligence; it is the revolt of the brute against the man.

The outburst of public indignation such as that at Owensboro is justified with a plea that it is the only way, if a rough one, to obtain justice; but this is only a condemnation of that community and every other one. This is a government of the people; if laws are lax and justice cheap, the people are responsible. If crimes are unpunished, it is because the leading men in a community will not register, will not vote, because they allow all the machinery of government to fall into the hands of the ignorant and vicious; because they will not serve on juries, will not combine to defeat incompetent judges, will not rebuke indecent behavior and vicious practices. Their concern is intermittent. If crime is not punished in Magoffin or Franklin or Jefferson, the people of Daviess are unconcerned. More, they hear with indifference of the acquittal of one guilty man after another in their own place, and do nothing until, grown bold by immunity, crime manifests itself in some startling way, and then we have a mob.

The folly, the futility, the fatality of a mob were never more clearly exhibited than at Owensboro. In order to hang a brutal negro a faithful officer was slain. Lucas was evidently the first citizen of Daviess county, for he was animated by the highest devotion to the interest of society. The spirit which he manifested is the spirit which must control the whole people before we can expect peace, quiet repose.

The law must be upheld even at the cost of life itself. His blood is on our hands; he is the victim of our failure to do our duty as good citizens. We place our fellow-citizens in positions of trust and difficulty; we impose on them certain important and dangerous duties, then we desert them and leave them alone to struggle with organized lawlessness.

Lucas died combatting not alone the mob of Daviess county; he fell not simply in defense of one poor negro. He faced the people of Kentucky recreant to their duty, and he defended every citizen and every home in the State against our own assaults. He stood alone, sacrificed to his sense of duty and to our neglect. If it awakens our people to a better appreciation of the responsibilities of citizenship; if it arouses as it should the people everywhere to demand better laws, firmer judges and juries determined to punish crime and to restrain the lawless elements, Lucas, the jailer of Daviess county, will not have died in vain.

[Louisville Post.]

Jailer Lucas, of Owensboro, gave up his life bravely defending his prisoner from an angry mob. He died like a hero. While his life was worth a hundred of such as that of the wretch he was defending, his example is worthy of emulation. by every jailer in the State. He had a trust to fulfill and he fulfilled it to the letter. If all jailers were as brave, were better prepared, lynch law would soon be a thing of the past in Kentucky. The good people of Owensboro should see to it that Lucas' family is well cared for.



Semi-Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 18 July 1884, p.4:

Funeral of Jailer Lucas.

The funeral of Mr. Wm. J. Lucas, late jailer of Daviess county, was attended by an immense throng of people Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock. The services were held at his late residence, and the interment was at Elmwood. A long procession of carriages followed the remains to the cemetery. At a meeting of the bar, of which Judge Williams was chairman and Mr. Geo. F. Haynes secretary, resolutions of respect to the memory of Mr. Lucas, couched in strong and highly complimentary language, were adopted.

Mrs. Lucas for Jailer.

Mrs. M. C. Lucas, widow of the late jailer, acting upon the advice of a number of members of the bar who consider her eligible to the office, has announced herself a candidate for jailer to fill the unexpired term of her late husband. Mrs. Lucas is left with a large family to support and without means, and it is said she will have no opposition.

The Lucas Fund.

The MESSENGER'S suggestion of a subscription fund for the benefit of the family of the late jailer has met with favor, and a number of citizens have called at our office and contributed to it, and others have indicated their willingness to do so. Subscriptions will be entirely voluntary, and to the credit of the city and county we hope to see the fund rise into the hundreds| within the next few days. Call and leave your name and money.



Semi-Weekly 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.



Semi-Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 29 July 1884, p.4:

Card From Mrs. Lucas.

To the people of Daviess County:

Reports having been circulated that I had withdrawn from the race for the office of jailer of Daviess county, I adopt this method of saying to the good people of my county that a majority of the members of the Owensboro bar having concurred in the opinion that I am eligible to said office, I became a candidate for the balance of the term for which my late husband was elected, and he would probably have filled to its close had he thought less of duty and more of self. I had hoped to have no opposition, but this hope proving vain, I can only say that I shall be a candidate for it till the close of the polls on August 4th, and that I shall ever be grateful for the support which a kind and generous people may give me in this my hour of need.

M. C. LUCAS.



Election for jailer of Daviess County, KY on Monday, 4 August 1884:

Mildred C. Lucas was elected jailer. The following are the vote tallies of the candidates for the office:

Mildred C. Lucas	1481	Peter W. Clark	132
S. T. Duncan	1178	P. S. Graves	128
Nicholas M. Lancaster	884	William Able	52
Louis F. Wahl	730	Samuel C. Jackson	43
J. J. Loney	138	Benjamin F. Miller	39

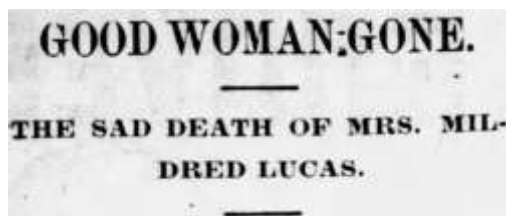


Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 1 February 1888, p.2:

A BILL for the relief of A. C. Gooch, of Logan county, who answered the summons of the sheriff to help protect a negro under arrest from a mob and was shot in the back, causing paralysis, is before the Legislature. The exact nature of the relief asked is not stated, but this reminds us that nothing was ever done for the relief of the family of Wm. J. Lucas, late jailer of Daviess county, who gave up his life in defending, unaided save by his half-grown son, a negro from a mob. He left a widow who, with a number of small children, has bravely fought her own way in the world, while no appropriation for a stone to mark his grave, or even a resolution commending his heroic fidelity to the trust reposed in his hands, has ever been passed by the Legislature or the county court of Daviess.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 15 March 1898, p.5:



Was Widow of the Martyred Jailer,
and Held the Office Herself for a Term.

Mrs. Mildred C. Lucas died of consumption at 3:15 p. m. Sunday, at the residence of Mr. Ed M. Bell, Fourth street. The funeral occurred from the First Baptist church at 3 p. m. Monday, Rev. G. L. Morrill conducting the services. The pall bearers were, W. H. Brannon, John W. Carter, George H. Cox, Ed M. Bell, R. W. Slack and Prof. James McGinniss. Interment at Elmwood.

Mrs. Lucas was born in Fairfax county, Va., June 15, 1843, and was married to W. J. Lucas October 4, 1865. She was the mother of seven children, three of whom died of consumption in the past two years. Three, children survive her – Thomas Lucas, of Chicago; G. Summers Lucas, of Madisonville; and Miss Blanche Lucas, of Owensboro, a teacher in the city schools. She was a consistent member Baptist church and was a Christian woman.

Her husband, W. J. Lucas, was killed by a mob on the night of Sunday, July 13, 1884, which mob took from the jail Richard May, a negro accused of attempting to ravish the invalid daughter of Sod Kelly, a farmer who resided about two miles above Owensboro. He was shot down while defending the jail from the mob.

Mrs. Lucas was appointed by the court to act as jailer until ensuing election, which was on the first Monday in the following August. She was a candidate for the office to fill out her husband's unexpired term, and she was elected over S. T. Duncan by a plurality of 313 and defeating nine competitors. She held the office nearly two years before the court of appeals decided that she was ineligible. Duncan contested her eligibility to office and Judge J. D. Atchison, the county judge, declined to issue to her a certificate of election. When the matter came before the contesting board Mr. R. W. Slack, as attorney for Mrs. Lucas filed an affidavit to remove Judge Atchison from the bench, which led almost to a personal altercation in the court room between Judge Atchison and Mr. Slack. The judge finally vacated the bench. The case was taken into the circuit court and on September 3, 1884, Judge Little awarded a mandamus requiring Judge Atchison to allow Mrs. Lucas to qualify.



Monument of Mildred S. Lucas, born 8 June 1846 & died 13 March 1898; Lucas family lot, section A, Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY.

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.



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, 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 Brazier'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, 14 July 2016, pp.1B & 3B:

What would Millie Lucas think about all this?

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

This summer, it appears likely that a woman will be nominated for the first time by a major party as its candidate for the presidency of the United States.

I wonder what Millie Lucas would think if she could see how far women have come in politics.

Mildred "Millie" Summers Lucas, you see, was the first woman elected to public office in Daviess County.

And then, the highest court in Kentucky ruled that she couldn't serve.

Because women couldn't vote.

Lucas was thrust into the political spotlight on the night of July 13, 1884, when a lynch mob murdered her husband Daviess County Jailer William Joseph Lucas.

W. J. Lucas, had been a lieutenant in the Confederate army.

But he died trying to save a black prisoner from a lynch mob.

Newspaper accounts at the time said Lucas was a painter before his election – "a poor but hard-working man of an eccentric and peculiar nature."

On July 4, Dick May was accused of attempting to rape the invalid daughter of the farmer he worked for.

The town was filled with rumors that a mob was on its way to the jail, which was then on the southeast corner of the Courthouse Square.

At one point, the county hired extra guards to help Lucas defend the prisoner.

But after a day or two, the extra guards were removed.

Millie Lucas and the children were invited to stay with friends. But she announced that she would stay with her husband.

When the masked mob arrived that fateful night, they demanded that Lucas turn over the prisoner. He refused and shots were fired to frighten him into surrendering.

But Lucas fired back seven times and then he was struck by a bullet.

Years later, Millie Lucas' sister, Sarah Summers Clark, wrote, "His wife, who had been my timid little sister all during the war, heard the shooting and came at once. She and their 12-year-old son stood right beside him.

"When at last Lucas fell dead, my sister, Millie, seized his pistol and with all the fury of her pent-up life, screamed, 'The first man that advances I'll kill.' She held the mob at bay until the sheriff arrived and disbursed them."

That's probably a little overly dramatic.

Old newspaper accounts say Millie Lucas tried to get medical attention for her husband. But the mob refused to let her son, Tommy, go for the doctor.

However, a doctor came through the mob and entered the jail to attend to Lucas.

With Lucas wounded, the mob took sledgehammers and began beating on the door to May's cell.

And while Lucas lay dying, they dragged May to a tree on the east side of the courthouse and lynched him.

The Messenger & 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 said.

It suggested that 1,000 county residents donate \$1 each to help provide for the Lucas children.

The day after her husband's death, Millie Lucas was appointed to fill her late husband's position until an election could be held in August.

Her sister wrote, "Mrs. Lucas was immediately appointed jailer in her husband's place. Anyone so brave as she was, everyone said, was entitled to the office. My sister was the first woman in the United States to hold such an office.

She added, "She received bushels of letters from all over the United States congratulating her. Mrs. Cady M. Stanton, the famous women's rights champion, was one who wrote to her praising her bravery. And yet all during the war my sister had never shown the slightest sign of courage. Yet she turned out to be the bravest of us all."

There were questions about whether a woman could hold public office.

But at least 10 local attorneys, local newspapers reported at the time, announced they thought Millie Lucas could legally hold office.

But Attorney C.H. Walker disagreed.

He said the community should help Lucas through charily, not by discarding "the fundamental principles of the law itself."

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

Millie Lucas won the August election by 313 votes and defeated nine opponents.

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

Millie Lucas refused to vacate her office while the courts considered the case.

She held on for 16 months.

But finally, the Kentucky Court of Appeals ruled that she wasn't eligible to be elected to public office.

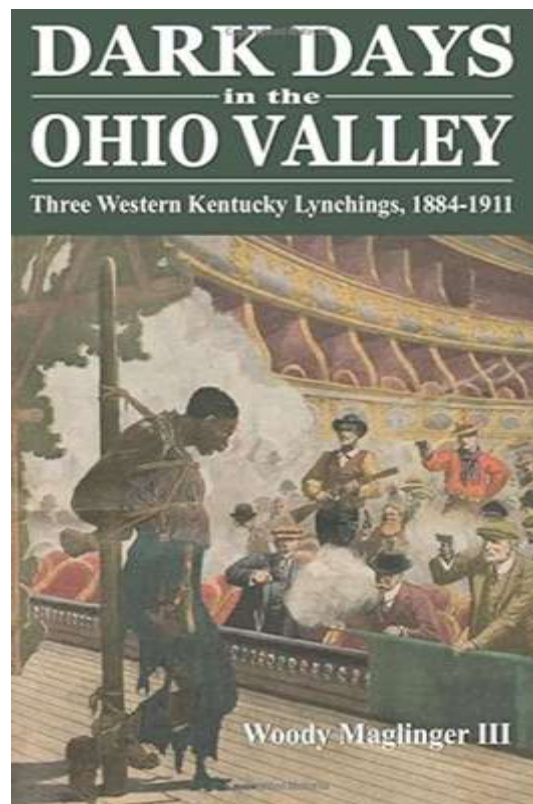
Millie Lucas was reimbursed \$294 for feeding prisoners, but wasn't paid for other work she did as jailer.

She more or less disappeared from the spotlight after that.

Millie Lucas died of consumption in 1898.

She was 55.

Today, 132 years later, Millie Lucas remains Daviess County's first – and only – female jailer.



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 Mag1). It can also be found and downloaded on the internet in the digital collection of the Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY:

<https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/242/>

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.



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

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

By Jim Mayse, Messenger-Inquirer

Daviess County Jailer Art Maglinger wants people to remember William J. Lucas.

The former Daviess 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 Daviess 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 Daviess 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 Daviess 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 Daviess 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 "beastly 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."



Then We Came To California, A Biography of Sarah Summers Clarke,
Written in the First Person by Ralph Leroy Milliken;
Merced Express, Merced, California, 1938, 95 pages:
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015041065445&seq=1>

Pages 43-44: During the latter part of the war our afflictions were great. ...Mosby had a pitched battle and there were a number of wounded. One of these was Lieutenant Lucas. We had

met him at the time of the Battle of Bull Run. He had become very much in love with my sister, Millie, and when he was wounded, he asked to be brought to mother's house. He was shot right through the face. Lieutenant Lucas had had an adventurous career. He was from Maryland. There were six brothers. Five of them were in the Confederate army. The other brother, however, was a lieutenant in the Union army. After the battle of Bull Run Lucas was in Lee's army and in a battle up in Maryland he was captured. He was all grimy with smoke and the dirt of battle. When he had washed himself the officer who had taken him prisoner came to see him. It was his brother! Neither had recognized the other in the thick of battle. After a few months in prison the Northern brother succeeded in getting Lucas exchanged. He immediately transferred to Mosby's command and served the last six months of the war under Mosby. It was during this time that he was wounded and brought to our house. Lieutenant Lucas was very daring. There was never anything too hard for him to do. Mosby thought lots of him and came several times to our house to see him. I had seen Colonel Mosby riding with his men on several occasions before this. Lucas was several weeks at our house. My sister, Millie, was so different from Betty and myself. Millie was timid and never adventurous. Even when the stragglers were in our kitchen she sat still in her chair and let her younger sister, Isabella, go with me for help. Lieutenant Lucas was very sincere in his love for Millicent and only the war kept them from being married.

Pages 48-49: Lieutenant Lucas returned soon after the war ended and he and my sister, Millie, were married. She was hardly eighteen, but girls married much earlier in those days than they do now. He and his bride went to Stafford Court House to live and here they opened up a little store. In a few years they moved to Owensburg, Kentucky, where Mr. Lucas had several brothers who were doing well in business. Mr. Lucas was quite a politician and soon was elected to office. In time he became a deputy sheriff. Negroes were jerked up on very slight provocation after the war and dealt with harshly. Lucas was the jailor. Some white girls had been attacked and several negroes were arrested and lodged in jail. Lucas thought these particular negroes were innocent. When a mob formed to lynch them he refused to give them up. The mob began shooting in the hopes of intimidating him. Lucas absolutely refused to let the mob have the keys. His wife, who had been my timid little sister all during the war, heard the shooting and came at once. She and their twelve-year-old son stood right beside him. When at last Lucas fell dead my sister, Millie, seized his pistol and with all the fury of her pent-up life screamed, "The first man that advances I'll kill." She held the mob at bay until the sheriff arrived and disbursed them. Mrs. Lucas was immediately appointed jailer in her husband's place. Anyone so brave as she was, everyone said, was entitled to the office. My sister was the first woman in the United States to hold such an office. She received bushels of letters from all over the United States congratulating her. Mrs. Cady M. Stanton, the famous women's rights champion, was one who wrote to her praising her bravery. And yet all during the war my sister had never shown the slightest sign of courage. She never was adventurous. Even when the stragglers were at our house she was not moved to action. Yet she turned out to be the bravest of us all.



Notes on the Lucas family by Jerry Long

William Joseph Lucas, son of William J. Lucas & Alice M. Sparks, was born 5 August 1835 in St. Mary's County, Maryland. He married Mildred Catharine Summers on 4 October 1865 in Fauquier County, VA She was born in Fairfax County, Virginia on 8 June 1846. Her parents,

William Thomas Summers (1819-1858) & Marianna Johnson (1822-1903), were married on 1 February 1844 in Fauquier County, VA and are buried in Fairfax County, VA.

William J. Lucas appears in the 1860 census of St. Mary's County, Maryland:

Colltis (?) Sarah	55	born Maryland	black – farm hand
Lucas, William J.	25	born Maryland	painter

William J. & Mildred C. Lucas are listed in the 1870 census of Stafford, Stafford County, Virginia – their family was enumerated as:

Lucas, William J.	35	born Maryland	keeps a hotel
“ Mildred C.	23	born Virginia,	keeps house
“ Thomas	4	born Virginia	male
“ R. B.	2	born Virginia	female
“ G. S.	7/12	born Virginia	female, born Jan. 1870
Broomfield, Sally	70	born Virginia	black – cook
Ross, Andrew	14	born Virginia	mulatto – servant

In 1872 William J. Lucas and family moved to Owensboro, KY. In the 1880 census of Owensboro, Daviess County, KY their family was recorded as:

Lucas, Jos. W.	48	born Maryland	house painter
“ Mildred	34	born Virginia	wife – keeps house
“ Thomas	14	born Virginia	male
“ Blanche	12	born Virginia	female
“ Summers	10	born Virginia	male
“ Forris	4	born Kentucky	male
“ Regina	1	born Kentucky	female

William J. Lucas died on 14 July 1884 in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. He was shot and killed by a lynch mob. He was survived by his wife and six children. His wife, Mildred, died of consumption in Owensboro on 13 March 1898. William J. & Mildred were buried in section A of Elmwood Cemetery in Owensboro, KY.

William & Mildred had seven children –

1. Thomas Montgomery Lucas, born 17 August 1866 VA. Married Nellie R. Bryant (1871-1920), 25 November 1891 Cook County, IL Died 20 April 1907 Chicago, Cook County, IL. Buried Forest Home Cemetery, Forest Park, Cook County, IL.
2. Rena Blanche Lucas, born 7 July 1868 VA. Died after 1940. She was single and residing in Manhattan, New York at the time of the 1930 & 1940 federal censuses. Possibly may be Rena Lucas, who died on 3 January 1960 in Murray Hill, Manhattan, New York at the age of 91 (New York State, U.S., Death Index, 1957-1972)
3. George Summers Lucas, born 7 January 1870 Manassas VA. Married Mattie May Sheffer (1869-1941), 11 April 1893 Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. Died 16 October 1950 Little Rock, AR. Buried Oakland Cemetery, Little Rock, AR.

4. Marianna Alice Lucas, born 12 November 1872 Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. Died 14 June 1874. Buried Lucas family lot in section A at Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY.
5. Forris F. Lucas (son), born 4 June 1876 Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. Died of consumption at age 19 on 20 February 1896 in Owensboro, KY. Buried Lucas family lot in section A at Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY.
6. Regina B. Lucas, born 4 June 1879 Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. Died of consumption at age 17 on 24 February 1897 in Owensboro, KY. Buried Lucas family lot in section A at Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY.
7. Anna Bishop Lucas, born 30 August 1881 Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. Died of consumption on 10 January 1897 in Owensboro, KY. Buried Lucas family lot in section A at Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY.

