

## Anger led to 8 Boone Co. lynchings

Mark Curnutte Cincinnati Enquirer USA TODAY NETWORK

Geography and prevailing anger among former Confederate soldiers were major reasons Boone County was the site of eight lynchings of black men during the 1870s and 1880s.

The lynchings occurred from 1876 through 1885, which one historian refers to as an “intense 10-year period.”

“For the time period, we had a precarious location, 40 miles of river-front” with free states Indiana and Ohio to the west and north, said Hillary Delaney, local history services associate at the Boone County Public Library. “This county aggressively tried to keep slaves in the state.”

After the Civil War, a band of Confederate army veterans organized loosely in Walton at the Gaines Tavern, which still stands today on Old Nicholson Road.

“A segment of the population was intent on keeping slaves in their place,” Delaney said. “The lynchings were driven by these people from the Walton-Verona area. They fed off each other. They got people out of jail or just found them on their own.”

Four of the eight documented lynchings of black men in Boone County are commemorated on a monument in the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. Billed as the first of its kind, the memorial that opened last month names 4,400 known African-Americans lynched during a 70-year reign of racial terror beginning in 1877.

The names are inscribed in a 6-foot, rust-colored steel monument that hangs vertically – like a body – from the ceiling in the open-air memorial. A duplicative steel monument, also bearing the names of four Boone County victims, rests coffin-like in an adjacent park. Monument creators at the Equal Justice Initiative, a civil rights and legal organization located in the Alabama capital, want each county to claim their monument and display it on their own soil.

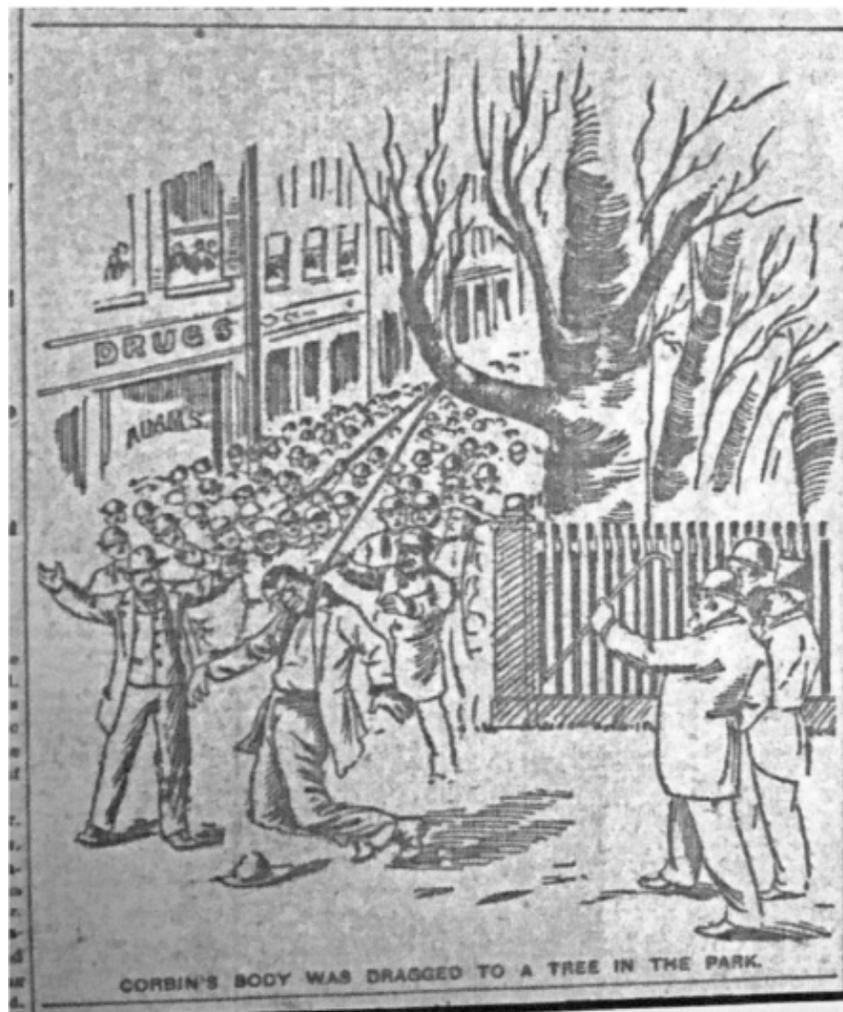
Boone County Judge-executive Gary Moore said he’s interested in the subject matter and is in contact with the county’s historic preservation officer, who has more information on the history of lynching there.

## Rape of white women was common accusation

The four Boone County victims named in the Alabama memorial are Parker Mayo, Theodore Daniels, Charles Dickenson and Sam Scales.

Three of the four, excluding Dickenson, were accused of rape. About 25 percent of the 4,400 memorialized African-American lynching victims allegedly committed rape, according to the Equal Justice Initiative's 2015 "Lynching in America" report.

**March 1877:** Mayo, a native of South Carolina, was accused of trying twice to rape the 9-year-old daughter of a white family in the Walton area. The next day, Mayo tried to rape the wife of a nearby farmer, *The Enquirer* reported. Her husband heard her screams. Mayo was captured and taken to jail in Burlington.



*The Daily Cincinnati Enquirer* published this illustration of the lynching of Henry Corbin in Oxford, Ohio, on the front page of its Jan. 15, 1892, edition.

THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER



*The Gaines Tavern in Walton, Ky., is believed by historians to have been a meeting place of a band of Confederate army veterans.*

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On the night of his second attempted rape, The Enquirer reported, Mayo's body was found hanging from a tree in Walton. The Mayo lynching took place near Gaines Tavern.

The tavern had been owned by Archibald Gaines, who died in 1871. Before the Civil War, he also owned several slaves, including Margaret Garner and her husband, Robert, and their four children. The subject of Toni Morrison's 1987 novel "Beloved," the Garners escaped in 1856 into Ohio but were recaptured in Cincinnati by U.S. marshals accompanied by Gaines and a posse of men. Robert Garner died in the shootout. Margaret Garner slit the throat of her 2-year-old daughter rather than see her face a life of slavery and stabbed herself and her other three children.

**September 1879:** Daniels, whose name was also reported as Theodore Daniels, was a farmhand who worked near Union and had been accused of raping a 16-year-old white girl in Walton. The Cincinnati Daily Star reported the girl's name as Mary Carney. The Boone County Recorder reported her name as Georgia Billeter, age 15.

The Daily Star reported that the rape was "prevented by the timely arrival of friends, who caught the rascal and took him to ... Burlington, where a posse of citizens was

summoned. That was about 7 o'clock this morning when a mock trial was held and the negro was sentenced to be shot."

Daniels, who denied the alleged crime, was tied to a tree and shot, the fatal ball severing the main artery in his neck. The mob then hung him. He bled to death, the Daily Star reported.

**May 1884:** Dickenson was biracial, 17, and worked for a farmer near Walton. In February, he had stolen \$192 from the family and went to Louisville, where he enlisted in the U.S. Army. He was captured and returned to Burlington's jail. He and other prisoners would escape, but Dickenson was recaptured after several weeks.

(His surname was spelled multiple ways in newspaper reports. The Chicago Tribune spelled it Dickerson. The Boone County Recorder reported it as Dickson. The Enquirer identified him as Charles Dickenson.)

On Saturday night, May 3, a drunken mob of masked men broke into the jail, overpowered the jailer and took Dickenson to the hangman's tree just outside of town. The Enquirer re-ported on May 6 that the drunken assailants botched the hanging and de-scribed the irregular knot and how Dickenson's feet were only a foot off the ground.

His body was dug up the next night from his shallow pauper's grave by local doctors and medical students and dissected, The Enquirer wrote.

**September 1885:** Scales was a hired farmhand who was accused of raping a 6-year-old white girl, daughter of a family that also worked on the farm near Walton. A wire service re-ort on Sept. 11 that year described Scales as 18 and "burly." Law enforcement arrested him and took him to the county jail. The night of his arrest, a mob formed in Florence, went to Burlington, broke him out and took him to "dark woods on the turnpike and hanged him to a tree."

The tree stood near what today is the intersection of Camp Ernst Road and Kentucky 18. Mob leaders made an additional statement. The tree was on property owned by a white Universalist family suspected of being abolitionists.

The attitudes of defeated Confederate soldiers who returned to Boone County were consistent with those throughout the South, said George Wright, a former University of Kentucky professor and today a professor of history at Texas A&M University.

"The Civil War unleashed violence against blacks," said Wright, author of multiple publications about lynching, including the 1990 book "Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and Legal Lynchings."

"There were great concerns about the new economic order among whites. They could not take out their frustrations on the victorious North and federal government. They were intent on keeping ex-slaves at the bot-tom. That included blacks who had been

soldiers, activist blacks who called for equal rights, and industrious, assertive black people considered 'uppity.' ”

## Mobs overpowered guards holding victims

Four other Boone County lynchings of black men are not yet recorded in the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

**July 1876:** A free black man named Smith Williams, who lived and worked on a farm near Anderson Ferry on the Boone County side of the Ohio River, hunted without permission on the land of a neighbor. The property owner's son, Fred Wahl, confronted Williams.

During the scuffle, Williams admitted to accidentally shooting Wahl in the hip, a wound from which he died three days later.

Williams had escaped to Indianapolis before his capture and return to Burlington. A group of masked men – reported by The Ticket newspaper of Covington to number between 20 and 100 – took the keys from the jailer, who lived across the street, and stormed Williams' cell. He resisted, striking one of the masked men with a hatchet, before being shot.

The mob took him from the jail at 1:15 a.m. and led about a mile outside of Burlington to the hangman's tree. Williams was then “stripped perfectly nude and hanged to a tree, after which the body was riddled with bullets.”

**July 1876:** Joe Payne was captured nude in the woods after committing “horrible outrage upon the person of his employer's daughter, a young lady eighteen or nineteen years old,” the Boone County Recorder reported. Payne confessed, according to the newspaper, and was transferred from Union to Burlington. There, “a body of disgusted men overpowered” six guards and shot Payne to death.

**September 1879:** A wire service report in the Eaton (Ohio) Democrat reported that Willis Jackson, 25, “was lynched in Boone County for committing the prevailing crime upon a young girl, fifteen years old, named Ella Kearney.”

**January 1880:** Charles Smith, who'd been arrested for allegedly burning a barn, the year's harvest and two calves near Walton. The Daily Commonwealth of Covington reported that Smith confessed to the arson. Smith was being transferred to Burlington, when, two miles north of Walton, a group of vigilantes took him from the three guards who were transporting him.

“He was hung to a convenient tree till he was dead,” the paper wrote before offering this coda paragraph to the story of Smith's death published Jan. 15, 1880.

“Boone County is gaining a reputation for this kind of swift justice.”