

**“The Truth Is Not Always in Black and White:
How The Press Misread the David Walker Family Lynchings”**

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“The Truth Is Not Always in Black and White:
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The recently opened National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, has shown a necessary spotlight on the nation’s history of racially-motivated lynchings and, in doing so, has encouraged communities to engage with their local racial histories constructively and with purpose.¹ Many communities have accepted this challenge and are working in interracial groups to research lynchings and memorialize the victims within their communities. Researching lynchings, however, is not easy. Except in instances of public spectacles, lynchings were often carried out under cloak of darkness with few or no witnesses by men who made some effort to disguise themselves. Communities either turned a blind eye or were afraid to provide information to law enforcement for fear of reprisal. Consequently, sources of information are very limited.

Under such circumstances, it is all too easy for inexperienced researchers to accept readily available newspaper accounts as the definitive source for the facts. Unfortunately, in the past, just as today, newspapers rushed to print a sensational story as quickly as possible and often relied on gossip and innuendo to provide background. Local newspapers also had a vested interest in protecting a community’s reputation in the face of outside criticism, which could be particularly harsh when the community was charged with being complicit in or, at a minimum, complacent about the unjustifiable actions of vigilantes. This paper is designed to highlight why it is necessary for community groups to do the historian’s work of going beyond newspaper

¹ National Memorial for Peace and Justice website, <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>, accessed Sept. 1, 2019.

accounts to look at all available historical records before attempting discussions about individual incidents of racially-motivated lynchings.

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Just before midnight on Saturday, October 3, 1908, a group calling themselves “Night Riders” from both sides of the western Kentucky-Tennessee border rode down on the home of David and Annie Walker, an African American couple living on a 2 1/2 acre farm in a small community located 3 1/2 miles south of Hickman, Kentucky. The riders called out to David Walker, and when he did not respond, they set fire to the house. As it went up in flames, the riders shot the couple and four of their children as they attempted to escape. Mr. Walker was killed instantly. Mrs. Walker, with an infant in her arms, was shot in the abdomen as she fled the house, though she lived long enough to give testimony at the coroner’s inquest. The infant, however, was also hit by a bullet and died as Mrs. Walker collapsed, still holding the infant in her arms. Other children were shot as well, and at least one young daughter died immediately. The family lay where they fell throughout the night and well into the following day before people in the community came to assist those still living and to remove the bodies of the dead.

Newspapers immediately picked up the story, and it was widely covered for several days in dailies across the country ranging from the *New York Times* to the *Los Angeles Times*, as well as most of the regional newspapers in between.² Unlike the reaction to many isolated lynchings, the press uniformly expressed shock and horror at the excess and brutality of the attack. The editorial board of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* went so far as to compare the white Night

² “Night Riders Kill Three,” *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 1908; “Mob Madness. Night Riders Slay Family,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 5, 1908; “Massacre for Negro Family,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Oct. 5, 1908; “Seven Are Shot by Angry Mob,” *Nashville Tennessean*, Oct. 5, 1908.

Riders unfavorably to Apaches. In the editors' words, "Not in the bloodiest days of border warfare between the aborigines and white settlers was a more ghastly outrage committed."³

Even though the press recognized that the Walker murders were unlike other lynchings, the newspapers failed to closely examine the circumstances surrounding the murders. They accepted the most expedient rationale offered for why the Walkers were targeted, and they presumed from the start that no one would ever be charged with the murders. They were wrong on both counts.

According to the newspapers, the simple answer to the "why" question was that David Walker had "cursed a white woman and drawn a gun upon a white man."⁴ That explanation does contain elements of the truth. David Walker had indeed been accused by a man named Joe Williams of using abusive language toward Williams's wife and of drawing a gun on him.⁵ The local *Hickman Courier*, published on Thursdays and therefore five days late to the story, already knew that this was not an adequate explanation for such a heinous crime and sought to bolster it by suggesting that "Walker was a bad negro" who, "in other instances" had been charged with being "brazen and impudent."⁶ The *Hickman Courier* continued to heap abuse on the Walkers the following week by printing that "Walker was no saint, neither his wife and 18-year-old girl, all of whom are said to have insulted a white lady with the most rank profanity."⁷ The *Paducah Sun-Democrat*, the nearest daily paper, said the opposite. According to that paper's local

³ "Worse Than the Apaches," *Courier-Journal*, Oct. 6, 1908.

⁴ "Night Riders Kill Three," *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 1908.

⁵ News item, p. 4, col. 5, *Hickman Courier*, June 5, 1908.

⁶ "Night Riders Wipe Out Negro Family—4 Dead, 4 Wounded," *Hickman Courier*, Oct. 8, 1908.

⁷ "Local Notes on the 'Night Rider' Situation," *Hickman Courier*, Oct. 15, 1908.

sources, Walker had never been in any serious trouble, and “the outrage has caused the greatest indignation in this part of [Fulton] county.”⁸

In fact, at the time of the murders, the Walkers were a well-established family in the Brownsville community near Hickman, Kentucky. David Walker’s father, Edward, called “Ned”, had moved to Fulton County from Obion County, Tennessee, and bought a 25-acre farm from a white man named A. J. Whipple in March 1878, when David was 12 years old.⁹ In 1892, 14 years after Ned bought his farm, David bought 2 1/2 acres from one of their white neighbors, T. P. Williams, who owned and lived on a quarter section of land that adjoined Ned’s property.¹⁰ David, called “Dave”, would have grown up with T. P. Williams’s children, one of whom was Joe Williams. Dave and Joe lived as neighbors apparently peaceably for 16 years before there was ever any record of significant trouble between them.¹¹ On June 5, 1908, four months before the murders, the *Hickman Courier*, carried a short news item which read:

Dave Walker was fined \$10 and cost Wednesday by County Judge Naylor for using abusive language. The warrant for his arrest was sworn to by Joe Williams and wife. Walker was also charged with flourishing a deadly weapon, but the evidence on this charge was not sufficient to convict.¹²

This brief account carried no suggestion of a racial transgression, and was so insignificant that it was sandwiched between two equally insignificant stories — one about a euchre party and

⁸ “Fire and Shot for Negroes,” *Paducah News-Democrat*, Oct. 6, 1908.

⁹ Recorded in Fulton County Deed Book 11, Page 350; 1880 U. S. Census Records at <https://www.censusrecords.com/record?id=usc%2f1880%2f005160675%2f00599&parentid=usc%2f1880%2f1000120725862>, accessed Aug. 5, 2019.

¹⁰ Recorded in Fulton County Deed Book 17, Page 261.

¹¹ Williams Plat recorded in Fulton County Process’ers & Comm’ers Rpts., Book 2, Page 146.

¹² News item, p. 4, col. 5, *Hickman Courier*, June 5, 1908.

the other about a house under construction that had blown down in a storm.¹³ A private investigator later told the *Louisville Courier-Journal* that the trouble was over Joe Williams's cattle, which had broken into one of Walker's fields. Dave went to Joe's house to speak to him about it, and when Joe's wife came to the door and said her husband was not at home, Dave "impugned her veracity."¹⁴

Assuming that story is true, the incident was essentially a spat between two neighbors, and Joe Williams responded by doing what he would have done with any white man: he took the matter to the courthouse and let the judge decide. As though to emphasize how trivial the dispute was, the judge simply fined Walker \$10 for using abusive language, as opposed to the maximum fine of \$50, and found him not guilty of flourishing a deadly weapon — an offense for which Walker could have been fined between \$50 and \$100, and ordered to serve 10–50 days in jail.¹⁵ These neighbors' disagreement became the excuse for Night Riders to give Dave Walker a whipping four months later — a whipping in which Joe Williams, tellingly, refused to participate.¹⁶

¹³ Id. Note that Dave Walker is not even identified as a negro, which would have been common at the time.

¹⁴ Warden Hale, "Detective Who Worked on Cases Tells of Attacks on Negroes in the Western Part of the State," *Courier-Journal*, Dec. 13, 1908.

¹⁵ Ky. Stat. §1271, §1308 (1899).

¹⁶ "Massacre for Negro Family," *Courier-Journal*, Oct. 5, 1908.

The preferred form of punishment for this particular band of Night Riders was whippings.¹⁷ In most instances, they whipped people for reasons stemming from some affront to one or more members of the gang.¹⁸ Between the months of April and October 1908, they were responsible for approximately 100 crimes — most of which were whippings of white men and women throughout Obion County, Tennessee. Dave Walker appears to have been the only black man ever targeted.¹⁹ All the evidence suggests that their plan that night was to treat Dave Walker as they had all their white victims, and, in fact, the earliest reports say that their “original intention” was to horsewhip him.²⁰

¹⁷ Night Riders had been active in both western Kentucky and northwest Tennessee for many months, albeit for different reasons. The Night Riders of western Kentucky were part of what has been called the Black Patch War. Briefly, in 1901, tobacco farmers in Middle Tennessee and western Kentucky began an effort of organized resistance against price-setting in the dark-fired tobacco industry led by the American Tobacco Company. When legal and legislative action failed, the farmer’s Association turned to vigilantism, and, beginning in early 1906, masked men calling themselves Night Riders began to burn tobacco warehouses and intimidate farmers unwilling to join the Association. By the spring of 1908, the Night Riders had established themselves in western Kentucky not only as the soldiers of the tobacco wars but as the enforcers of homogeneity and normative behavior in the region. See generally *Night Riders: Defending Community in the Black Patch, 1890-1915* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993). According to at least one source, the Reelfoot Lake Night Riders received advice from their friends among the Black Patch Night Riders in Calloway County, Kentucky, about how to develop a manifesto and an organizational structure, create an oath to administer to members on penalty of death, and use signals, passwords, and disguises to maintain secrecy. See David G. Hayes, *The Historic Reelfoot Lake Region: An Early History of the People and Places of Western Obion and Present Day Lake County* (Collierville, TN: InstantPublisher.com, 1917), 313.

¹⁸ This probably explains why they stopped at Joe Williams’s house and tried to persuade him to go with them on the night they went to the Walkers. When he refused, they implicated him anyway by insisting he hold their horses while they walked to Walker’s house.

¹⁹ Hayes, *The Historic Reelfoot Lake Region*, 316-317, 328.

²⁰ “Night Riders Kill Three,” *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 1908; “Massacre for Negro Family,” *Courier-Journal*, Oct. 5, 1908.

Typically, however, Night Rider actions followed on the heels of some immediate past wrong. Why did the Night Riders choose the night of October 3 — four months after the Fulton County Court had disposed of Joe Williams’s complaint against Dave Walker — to administer the whipping? Events of the day provide a probable answer. On the afternoon of October 3, an Obion County jury had deadlocked at the conclusion of a trial against several Night Riders who had been charged with whipping a white man named J. W. Rook.²¹ It was the first time any Reelfoot Lake Night Rider had been put on trial for “whitecapping,” and the resulting mistrial meant the Night Riders had effectively won.²² In the words of the *Hickman Courier*, liquor flowed through the streets of town that night.²³ It seems likely that drunken Night Riders decided to celebrate their invincibility by riding to Dave Walker’s farm outside Hickman essentially on a pretext with nothing more than a plan to whip Walker as they had J. W. Rook.²⁴

They had never been met with resistance and would not have anticipated it that night. Dave Walker, however, was not like their other victims. Dave Walker, a black man, would have looked out and seen Night Riders approaching his home and known instantly how vulnerable he

²¹ “Night Rider Trial Over,” *Hickman Courier*, Oct. 8, 1908.

²² Whitecapping was a term used for the unlawful infliction of corporal punishment. It derived from a group calling themselves White Caps, which appears to have originated in Indiana in the 1880s. White Caps claimed to enforce extrajudicial moral codes. See *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 143.

²³ “Lid Was Off Saturday,” *Hickman Courier*, Oct. 8, 1908.

²⁴ Warden Hale suggested a similar motivation in his story for the *Courier-Journal*: “Taking license from the failure of the people of that section to convict . . . [they] marched forth in October . . . and four negroes living near Hickman were shot down in their tracks as they emerged from a burning cabin.” See Hale, “Detective Who Worked on Cases,” *Courier-Journal*, Dec. 13, 1908.

and his family were. So, when the Riders called him out, he stayed where he was rather than face them in the open. In other words, he did not obey their command, and, in their fury at his defiance, they reacted in the cruelest terms imaginable.²⁵ Someone grabbed a can of coal oil and they torched the house. In the ensuing chaos, they shot not only Walker but every person trying to escape the flames. The *Paducah Sun* captured the truth in its first headline about the story: “Negro Family Massacred at Hickman by Masked Men Sunday Morning Because They Resist Visitation.”²⁶

In recent years, another reason for the murders has been suggested. It has been claimed that a white neighbor wanted Dave Walker’s property.²⁷ This narrative developed as the result of yet another newspaper story written in 2001 by two reporters from the Associated Press. These reporters wrote that they had researched and documented 107 cases in which black families had been “unfairly stripped of their land.” The story, which received national coverage and was later included in a journalism textbook, claimed that Dave Walker’s property was effectively stolen from his surviving children. It included a description of Dave Walker’s murder and concluded

²⁵ Some newspapers suggested that Dave Walker fired on the Night Riders during the raid, but the evidence on this point is so contradictory that I have not tried to address it in this paper. See, e.g., “Seven Are Shot by Angry Mob,” *Tennessean*, Oct. 5, 1908; cf. “Night Riders’ Victims in Serious Condition,” *Tennessean*, Oct. 7, 1908. The point to be made is that he resisted — regardless of whether he used a firearm.

²⁶ *Paducah Sun*, Oct. 5, 1908.

²⁷ Websites making this claim include the following: <http://www.thiscruelwar.com/your-children-of-hell-have-broken-loose-again/>, accessed Jan. 26, 2019; https://wikivisually.com/wiki/Lynching_of_the_Walker_family, accessed Aug. 13, 2019; <https://atlantablackstar.com/2014/10/09/8-heartbreaking-cases-where-land-was-stolen-from-black-americans-through-racism-violence-and-murder/2/>, accessed Aug. 13, 2019. In some of these accounts, the Walker murders have been conflated with a 1915 wave of violence against black tenant farmers who lived in “the bottoms” outside Hickman. There is no known connection between the 1908 Walker murders and the 1915 attacks.

with the following: “Walker’s 2 1/2 acre farm was simply folded into the property of a white neighbor, who soon sold it to another man — whose daughter owns the undeveloped land today.”²⁸ My research strongly suggests otherwise.

Probate records in the Fulton County Clerk’s office clearly show that the estate of David Walker was handled properly through the probate court of Fulton County. An administrator, J.P. Leggate, was appointed in October 1908 to administer the estate, and the estate was kept open until 1915, when the three surviving children all came of age.²⁹ According to the county’s delinquency lists, real estate taxes on the property were current until 1914. Only then does the property appear in the sheriff’s delinquent tax sale notice. As of 1914, the assessed value of Walker’s 2 1/2 acres was \$50.00, with taxes and cost due of \$3.23.³⁰ At that time, the three heirs were being represented by a white attorney from Fulton. They would certainly have known that their father owned his own land, and there were sufficient funds remaining in the estate in 1915 to have paid the \$3.23, had the children wanted to pay the taxes or even buy the land at the tax sale, as heirs often did at the time to ensure good title.³¹ For whatever reason, they allowed the property to be sold for failure to pay back taxes by the county sheriff, and there is nothing in the

²⁸ Todd Lewan and Dolores Barclay, Associated Press, ““When They Steal Your Land, They Steal Your Future,”” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 2, 2001; Arlene Notoro Morgan, Alice Irene Pifer and Keith Woods, eds., *The Authentic Voice: The Best Reporting on Race and Ethnicity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 189.

²⁹ Appointment recorded in Fulton County Court Order Book 8, Page 333; Settlement recorded in Fulton County Probate Settlement Book 4, Page 112.

³⁰ “Sheriff’s Tax Sale,” *Hickman Courier*, Feb. 11, 18, 25, Mar. 4, 1915.

³¹ See handwritten receipt of payment signed by Herschel Smith as attorney for Willie Walker, Cular Walker, and Beulah Walker, recorded in Fulton County Probate Settlement Book 4, Page 112.

records to suggest that they attempted to redeem the property during the two-year redemption period.

The actual deed from the sheriff, Bailey Huddleston, to J. L. Dotson as purchaser of the property has not been located due to an incomplete recording in 1916; however, on February 16, 1922, Dotson conveyed the property to one Leonard Harding for the price of \$50.00 (the same amount as the assessed value in 1914). The deed to Harding contains the original property description as stated in David Walker's own deed when the property was conveyed to him by T. P. Williams. The deed to Harding further states:

This being the same property conveyed to J. L. Dotson by deed dated in the year of 1916, from Bailey Huddleston, Sheriff of Fulton County, and recorded in Book [...] land sold for taxes, page 222. This being a tax title from Huddleston to Dotson and from Dotson to Harding.³²

It is easy enough to see how this tax title could have been missed by the AP reporters who searched the land records in 2001. Leonard Harding died in 1975 and left his farm, including what had been David Walker's 2 1/2 acres, to his four children. Eventually, three of the siblings transferred their ownership interests to their sister, Ruth Norville. Two of those deeds referred specifically to the deed from T. P. Williams to Dave Walker, but failed to reference the tax title and subsequent transfer from J. L. Dotson to Leonard Harding.³³ Once Ruth Norville acquired all her father's holdings, what had once been identified as Dave Walker's property was

³² Recorded in Fulton County Deed Book 40, Page 102.

³³ Recording instruments from siblings to Ruth Norville recorded in the following: Fulton County Deed Book 101, Page 209; Deed Book 101, Page 220; Deed Book 103, Page 397.

legitimately “folded into” the surrounding property description and became part of what was later known as Leonard Harding’s homeplace.³⁴ As lawyers would say, the chain of title is clear.

Circumstances in the community support these facts. In particular, Ned Walker’s position as a member of the community was unchanged by the night’s events. If the neighbors wanted to rid themselves of David Walker and steal his 2 1/2 acre farm, it is logical to assume they would have wanted to rid themselves of Ned Walker and his 25-acre farm as well. The facts prove otherwise. Ned Walker continued to live within a stone’s throw of Joe Williams’s farm until 1919. Indeed, for several of those years Dave’s youngest surviving child, Willie Walker, lived on the farm with his grandfather.³⁵ In 1919, Ned sold the farm to one of his white neighbors for twice what he originally paid for it, and moved into Hickman to finish out his days living with his niece.³⁶ By then, he was over 100 years old, and had lived on the same farm in the same community in Fulton County for 40 years.

The other major erroneous claim by newspapers of the day as well as more recent accounts, including the Associated Press article, was that no one was ever charged with the murders.³⁷ That statement is false.

³⁴ Informal Settlement of Ruth Norville estate recorded in Fulton County Deed Book 187, Page 220.

³⁵ For several of those years, one of Dave’s children, Willie Walker, lived with him. See 1910 U. S. Census Records at <https://www.censusrecords.com/record?id=usc%2f1910%2f004971590%2f00163&parentid=usc%2f1910%2f004971590%2f00163%2f003>, accessed July 10, 2019.

³⁶ Recorded in Fulton County Deed Book 35, Page 596.

³⁷ George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and “Legal Lynchings”* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 124; Hayes, *The Reelfoot Lake Region*, 318; Morgan, Pifer and Woods, eds., *The Authentic Voice*, 189.

This was not a case in which the state took little interest in a racist lynching. On the contrary, Kentucky's Governor Augustus Willson, responded almost immediately. Willson, a lifelong Republican and close personal friend and supporter of U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan, clearly saw the murders as a blatant act of terrorism.³⁸ On October 12, he announced that he was offering a \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any person who participated in the "massacre" of the Walkers. In making the announcement, the governor spoke in impassioned terms about the brutality of the "cowardly fiends" who murdered a man "pleading for mercy," along with his wife and their young children:

If two or three men had gone to this poor cabin and murdered the family, the crime would have shocked humanity with its revelation of the incredible wickedness, brutality and dastardly cowardice of the three men. That a larger number, some fifty men, joined in such a crime, multiples the cowardliness and wickedness fiftyfold, and makes every member of the band guilty of murder in the first degree, of the basest, wickedest, the most cowardly and inhuman murder conceivable to mortal mind.³⁹

Willson had already dispatched state militia to Hickman on October 9, in response to an appeal from Hickman officials who feared further Night Rider attacks on the town.⁴⁰ Six weeks later, "every business man in the city of Hickman" sent a petition to the governor pleading with him to allow the militia to remain in Hickman. These businessmen did not see the threat as one

³⁸ Justice Harlan steadfastly opposed Jim Crow laws throughout his years on the Court and is best remembered as the sole voice of dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). See William E. Read and William C. Berman, "Papers of the First Justice Harlan at the University of Louisville," *American Journal of Legal History*, v. 11, no. 1 (Jan., 1967), 57-68; Alan F. Westin, "John Marshall Harlan and the Constitutional Rights of Negroes: The Transformation of a Southerner," *Yale Law Journal*, v. 66, no. 5 (Apr., 1957), 637-710.

³⁹ "Offers Reward for Hickman Murderers," *Courier-Journal*, Oct. 13, 1908.

⁴⁰ "Governor Orders Troops to Hickman," *Courier-Journal*, Oct. 9, 1908.

limited to a surly black farmer. In fact, they made no reference to race at all. Instead, the letter accompanying the petition contained the following: “. . . as your Excellency knows . . . just a short time prior to the soldier’s coming [Night Riders] murdered a whole family. It is an every day occurrence to hear the sympathizers of the Night Riders trying to justify the N.R’s [sic] acts and we believe it would be no mistake to allow the soldiers to remain here until the good citizens think the danger is past.”⁴¹

Unfortunately, within days of Governor Willson’s announcement, news of another deadly Night Rider attack exploded in northwest Tennessee. On October 18, 1908, just two weeks after the attack on the Walkers, Night Riders murdered a white attorney named Quintin Rankin on the banks of Reelfoot Lake in Obion County near an area called Walnut Log, just a short distance from the state line. The Night Riders held Rankin, along with others, responsible for curtailing their fishing rights on Reelfoot Lake. He was hanged by a noose dangling from a tree and shot to death less than 10 miles from David Walker’s farm.⁴²

The murder of Quintin Rankin, a former captain in the Spanish American War, set off a massive manhunt in Tennessee, which soon led to the arrest of ninety men alleged to be Night Riders.⁴³ Under pressure from state investigators, several of the detainees began to cooperate with the Obion County District Attorney and special prosecutors who had been brought in at the request of Tennessee’s Governor Malcolm R. Patterson.⁴⁴ One of the detainees was a 25-year old

⁴¹ Correspondence of Gov. Augustus Willson, Filson Historical Society, A/W742, fl 86.

⁴² Vanderwood, 43-47.

⁴³ Vanderwood, 73.

⁴⁴ Vanderwood, 79.

man named Frank Fehringer, whose family was from Obion County, but who had become a notorious bootlegger and petty gunslinger in Fulton County. Fehringer told the investigators that he was the Night Riders' leader on the nights that both Rankin and the Walkers were killed. He soon became the State's chief witness in a trial against eight men charged with the first degree murder of Quintin Rankin.⁴⁵

From the date Rankin's death was first reported, all media attention shifted to the Tennessee murder case. Although the Walker murders were raised in numerous court documents, including most notably the charge given to the Obion County Special Grand Jury when Rankin's murderers were indicted, only a few newspapers commented on the connection to the Walkers.⁴⁶ And, as the lead case and two other related cases moved forward through the appeals and retrial process, the story of what had happened to the Walkers in Kentucky was almost completely overshadowed by the Tennessee case.

The Fulton County Grand Jury, however, did its job. During the May term of 1909, Frank Fehringer was in fact indicted for the murders of the Walker family.⁴⁷ The indictments remained on the Commonwealth docket at least through April 28, 1910, when they were noted as having been set for the current term of court.⁴⁸ It does appear, however, that Fehringer was never tried for the murders. The reasons why are complicated. Fehringer remained under the

⁴⁵ Vanderwood, 75.

⁴⁶ "Bail for Men in Local Jail," *Tennessean*, Nov. 12, 1908; "Fight for Release," *Houston Post*, Nov. 12, 1908.

⁴⁷ "Circuit Court Notes," *Hickman Courier*, May 20, 1909.

⁴⁸ "Fulton Circuit Court Docket," *Hickman Courier*, April 28, 1910.

jurisdiction of the Tennessee courts for as long as it was necessary to resolve all the Rankin murder cases. Only then could Kentucky have extradited him to Fulton County for trial in the Walker murders. While in Tennessee, he married a woman and, within months, attempted to murder her and kill himself.⁴⁹ Following a trial in Chattanooga, he was found guilty of felonious assault and given a two-year prison sentence.⁵⁰ Records show that his release date from prison in Tennessee was October 18, 1911, three years after the Walkers' deaths.⁵¹ Although two other men had admitted to being present at the Walkers on the night of October 3, 1908, trial without Fehringer would have been difficult and would likely have led to the same resolution as the Tennessee cases.⁵² Despite spending two years of time, money, and effort to indict 90 men and conduct three trials (two of which resulted in hung juries) as well as one complicated appeal, the State of Tennessee never secured a final conviction against a single Night Rider for the murder of Quintin Rankin.⁵³ There is no reason to believe a different result would have been reached in a trial against Fehringer for the murder of the Walkers.

What then are we to take away from a close examination of the Walker murders? It appears that the press — then and now — misread David Walker and the circumstances

⁴⁹ “Frank Attempts Suicide,” *Hickman Courier*, July 12, 1910.

⁵⁰ “Frank Gets Two Years,” *Hickman Courier*, Oct. 27, 1910.

⁵¹ “Confessed Night Rider Tries to Kill Himself,” *Courier-Journal*, Nov. 19, 1910; Biennial Report of the Board of Prison Commissioners of the State of Tennessee, 1911-1912, v. 9, p. 199.

⁵² “Marshall on Stand,” *New Orleans Times Democrat*, Jan. 26, 1909; Vanderwood, 127.

⁵³ Early in the Rankin investigation, the Obion County Grand Jury received evidence that at least twelve Night Riders were from the Brownsville community in Kentucky, where the Walkers had lived. Nothing in the records suggests that any of the Reelfoot Lake Night Riders from Kentucky were ever arrested or indicted in Tennessee in connection with Rankin's murder. See “Bail for Men in Local Jail,” *Tennessean*, Nov. 12, 1908.

surrounding the Walker family murders. David Walker was a longstanding member of a farming community in which his neighbors appear to have treated him, if not as an equal, at least with respect. The governor of Kentucky condemned the Walker family murders in the harshest possible terms, and the Fulton County Grand Jury indicted Frank Fehringer for those murders. David Walker's estate was handled by the Fulton County court system in accordance with the law and sold his farm at a publicly advertised county tax sale. David Walker, his wife, and two of their children were murdered, not because he cursed a white woman, but because he refused to be whipped by a gang of whitecappers. Indeed, David Walker should be remembered as the one person in a hundred who resisted the Night Riders. As a matter of respect and in the interest of truth, any discussion of the David Walker family murders must begin with these facts.