

PART I, PREPARED BY JAMES BUFORD GIPSON

**MANCHESTER TIMES, MANCHESTER, TENNESSEE
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1934**

**EIGHT MEN ON TRIAL FOR SLAYING OF NEGRO FARM HAND ON JUNE
24, 1934**

It is expected that the testimony in the murder trial will be completed sometime during the day Friday, and that the case will go to the jury for its decision Saturday.

Trial of eight white men charged with the murder of Dick Lou Wilkerson, Negro farm hand, began Wednesday morning in circuit court here, with the testimony of Robert Richardson, 14 year old stepson of one of the defendants, who is credited with being one of the state's chief witnesses.

The eight defendants, Willard, Elijah [Lige] and Edmond [Edward] Keele brothers, John Gipson, Louis [Lewis] Garner, Wilburn Sherrill, Leonard Warren and John B Henley, have been held in jail since June 26, without bond.

Wilkerson was killed in a field near the Patton's Chapel Negro Church, early Sunday morning, following an ice cream festival at his church.

Witnesses testified that the eight men under arrest took the Negro's automobile, following him from the church, and shot and clubbed him to death. The same men are charged with entering the Negro's cabin and wrecking the furniture.

Witnesses examined Wednesday were Robert Richardson, Wade Bynum, employer of the slain man; Mrs Clay Buckner, L.D. Cash, S.R. Henley, Kirby Brock, Albert Jones and Maymie Wilkerson, the dead man's widow.

The story told by the Richardson boy followed closely his testimony given at the preliminary hearing in June. He said that he had gone with the eight white men in a car said to have been Wilkerson's and went to several houses in the vicinity of Patton's Chapel where Wilkerson had been one of the managers of an ice cream festival given by the colored church. The men asked if the Negro had been seen, the boy said, and at about 2:30 o'clock in the morning they overtook him in the road about two miles from the church. One of the men fired a shotgun at the Negro who crossed a fence and ran into an oat field. Six of the men got out of their car and followed him, but Henley and Gipson remained in the car with the boy for a few minutes, after which they followed the others into the field.

After the return of the eight to the car, they drove to several other houses in the neighborhood, asking if the Negro had been there. They went to the Wilkerson house on the Wade Bynum farm, where all the men went inside the house.

One of the shotguns – testimony indicated that there were at least three guns and possible five in the party – was obtained at the home of Clay Buckner, testimony showed.

Assisting Attorney General Lamb in the prosecution are: William McCowan of Fayetteville and J.O. McMahan of Manchester. Defense lawyers are: Walter M (Pete)

Haynes of Winchester, A.L. Davidson of Tullahoma, C.C. Warder, J.L. Ewell and David Shields of Manchester.

OTHER WITNESSES

Kirby Brock, Negro, said eight armed men, searching for the victim's home broke into his residence on the night of the killing but left when they failed to find Wilkerson there. Brock and his wife both identified Garner and Willard Keele and the men [man] said he talked with Garner and quoted him as saying the group was looking for Wilkerson.

Mrs Clay Buckner testified that a number of men came to her home on the night of the killing to get a gun Elijah Keele she declared asked for the weapon and she said she also recognized Garner and Edward Keele.

Ed Partin, store owner at Prairie Plains testified that John Gipson came to his house on the night of the killing to buy some 38 caliber gun shells but the merchant declared he refused to sell them.

Albert Jones said on the stand that he was mistaken for Wilkerson and the party three guns on him when they met him on the road. He said he recognized Willard Keel and Sherrill in the group. He also declared he heard shots fired about the time the killing was reported to have occurred.

Lee Cash, justice of the peace, said some of the defendants came to his home for a warrant, charging Wilkerson with assault.

The widow of Wilkerson said she went to the home of her sister-in-law following the festival. When she finally went home she said she found everything torn up and "nothing left but a chair."

Approximately 75 more witnesses are to be questioned and it is expected that the trial will continue for the rest of the week.

John Henry Jones and his wife, Julia May Jones both testified to the fact that a party of white men came to their home near the location of the murder, looking for Wilkerson.

Grover Bynum on the stand, told of the wreckage of Wilkerson's furniture.

S.R. Henley, deputy sheriff said that he was looking for Wilkerson to serve a warrant on him for assault on the person of Amos Walls. When he found the man, he was dead.

Coroner F.I. Couser, Dr. J.H. Farrar, and Sheriff C.D. Huffman gave testimony as to the position of the body, the wounds, and the inquest which was held a few hours after Wilkerson was found.

JURY IS SELECTED

More than five hundred names were drawn for the selection of the jury and 101 of them were examined before the twelfth man was selected Wednesday morning. It was the longest list for jury service in the history of the county.

MINUTES OF THE CIRCUIT COURT JURY OF TWELVE GOOD AND LAWFUL MEN TO WIT:

Bill Walker
Manuel Freeze

Stanley Caldwell
A.R. Jacobs

Flavy Taylor
Omar Morton

E.J. West
Andrew Ferrell

Chas. Bryant
Joe Stacy

Joe Hickerson
Elmer Bell

JUDGEMENT OF THE COURT

It is therefore the judgement of the Court upon the verdict of the Jury finding the defendants guilty of Voluntary Manslaughter that defendants Willard Keele, John Gipson and Lewis Garner for their offense of Voluntary Manslaughter be each confined in the penitentiary of the state for a period of not more than five years and that they pay the cost of the case; and the defendants Lige Keele, Edward Keele, Wilburn Sherrill, John B. Henley and Leonard Warren, each be confined in the penitentiary of the state for a period of not more than two years, for their offense of Voluntary Manslaughter and that they pay the cost of this prosecution.

However it being admitted that each of the defendants are hopelessly insolvent, judgement is rendered against the state for the cost accrued on the part of state in this prosecution, which will be certified by the clerk of this Court to the Controller of the state for payment as required by law.

This 8th day of September 1934

B.W. Smartt
Circuit Judge

ANNOTATION

The oral history passed down for the reason for this lynch mob was the Richardson boy lifted the skirt of one of the girls at the ice cream festival. For this, Wilkerson hit Richardson. Lee Cash, Justice of the Peace, refused to sign a warrant for assault against Wilkerson. They lynch mob was quickly formed.

James Buford Gipson
May 19, 2000

PART 2, PREPARED BY DONALD L. HILL

GENERAL COMMENTS

According to another oral history, Wilkerson hit Amos Walls with a stick, knocking him out for a while, in response to a remark that Walls made to Wilkerson's wife,. This is consistent with the newspaper article in that Amos Walls tried to get a warrant against Wilkerson. Apparently, in contrast to the oral history in the above Annotation, a warrant was indeed issued, because the deputy sheriff stated that he was looking for Wilkerson when his body was found. A likely sequence of events is that Robert Richardson, 14 year old stepson of John Gipson, caused a problem, and Wilkerson slapped him. Amos Walls intervened and was hit by Wilkerson. At that point, Wilkerson fled.

The car commandeered by the eight was actually Wilkerson's T-model truck, which would have the capacity to carry eight people. It was hot-wired by Johnny B. Henley so that the group could pursue Wilkerson. It is said that, after Wilkerson was killed, his body was dragged behind the vehicle. If indeed the men went looking for Wilkerson after he had been killed, this could have been an attempt to show that they did not find him and that someone else would have been responsible for the killing. In addition to destroying Wilkerson's furniture, the young white men poured out his flour and meal. Johnny B. Henley took

Wilkerson's raincoat, but his brother buried it in a field behind their house. For years, parts of the raincoat were uncovered when the field was plowed.

The timeline for these events is difficult to establish. Perhaps about 8 pm a melee involving Robert Richardson, Amos Walls, and Dick Lou Wilkerson erupted. It is not clear why these two white men were present at an ice cream social at a black church. Some of the other white men may have also been present. It is apparent, however, that Amos Walls tried to get (and apparently got) a warrant for the arrest of Dick Lou. Not satisfied, some of the white men rounded up their friends to look for Dick Lou. Considering that some of them lived "across the river" in Franklin County and that they either had to walk or ride mules, this may have taken several hours. It was perhaps after midnight when they arrived at Dick Lou's house and found that he was not there. They then visited the homes of several blacks in an attempt to find him. Proceeding east, they neared highway 41. Dick Lou, seeing his truck coming, may not have realized who was in the truck until it was too late. He was killed in a field on the north side of the road about 200 yards from highway 41. It is not clear why Dick Lou did not flee in his truck in the first place.

The fact that 101 men (all white) had to be called for selection of a jury shows the reluctance of white men to decide the fate of other white men accused of killing a black man.

It is ironic that, in a fight in 1923, Willard Keele had killed Jack Henley, the father of Johnny B. Henley. In another fight, in 1941, John (Bear) Gipson, one of the defendants in this case, killed Mack Wilcox, his brother-in-law.

It is said that the men served about half of their sentences.

IDENTITIES OF THOSE INVOLVED

s/o = son of, d/o = daughter of, m = married

Brock, Kirby: Black man, b. 1888, d. 1976.

Buckner, Clay: b. 1915, d. 1968. s/o Elisha Buckner and Emma Jane Baker.

Buckner, Mrs. Clay: Rosetta Lindsey, b. 1913, d. 1983. d/o William J. (Nick) Lindsey and Betty Frances Kennedy.

Bynum, Grover: John Grover Bynum, b. 1893, d. 1980. s/o William M. Bynum and Josie ?

Bynum, Wade: b. 1887, d. 1951. s/o William M. Bynum and Josie ?

Cash Lee D.: Levi D. Cash. b. 1881, d. 1954.

Garner, Lewis: Lewis Preston Garner, b. 1897, d. 1955 (in California). s/o Samuel Watt Garner and Louisa (Grady) Gipson.

Gipson, John: John (Bear) Gipson, b. 1900, d. 1980. s/o Jesse B. Gipson and Sally Morris.

Henley, John B.: b. 1911, d. 1984? s/o Andrew Jackson (Jack) Henley and Mary Tennessee Hill.

Henley, S. R.: Samuel Reed Henley, b. 1878, d. 1936. s/o David Alexander Henley and Mary Elizabeth Cherry.

Jones, Albert: Black man, no information.

Jones, John Henry: Black man, no information.

Jones, Julia May: Julia Wilkerson, married John Henry Jones in 1928.

Keele, Edward [Edmond]: Edmond Preston Keele, b. 1913, d. 1966. s/o Francis Marion (Bud) Keele and Sarah Catherine Campbell.

Keele, Elijah: Elijah M. Keele, b. 1906, d. 1944. s/o Francis Marion (Bud) Keele and Sarah Catherine Campbell.

Keele, Willard: Willard Gordon Keele, b. 1901, d. 1955. s/o Francis Marion (Bud) Keele and Sarah Catherine Campbell.

Partin, Ed: Edward Whitaker Partin, b. 1891, d. 1974. s/o Louis Marcus Partin and Mary Frances Sherrill.

Robert Richardson: b. 1920, d. 1997? s/o Willie R. M. Richardson and Vera Floyd, stepson of John Gipson.

Sherrill, Wilburn: Louis Wilburn Sherrill, b. 1913, d. 1979. s/o William M. Sherrill and Mary Lou Gipson.

Walls, Amos: b. 1915, d. 1953 (in Oregon). s/o Henry A. Walls and Della Mae Wimberley.

Warren, Leonard: Leonard Calvin Warren, b. 1912, d. 1986. s/o William Lee Warren and Hattie Viola Gipson.

Wilkerson, Dick Lou: See the census records below. In the census and other records, the name is generally Wilkinson. Dick Lou's given name was apparently Virgil, and he and his wife, Maymie/Mamie, are listed as grandchildren of Harry Wilkinson (b. 1844). That would make them first cousins. In the 1900 census of Coffee County, a grandchild of Harrison Wilkinson, named Lou, is listed as being born in July 1899. Although this child is recorded as female, it is possible that the census taker misunderstood the gender, since the name Lou was given. The mother of Lou is probably Ann (age 23, widow). Even at this early age, Virgil may have been called Lou. No census record for Lou, Dick, or Richard Wilkerson/Wilkinson has been found for 1910 or 1920.

One listing in 1930 (see below), however, could be that of Dick Lou Wilkinson. The given name of that particular Wilkinson (age 29) starts with an "L," but remainder of the name is illegible. Nevertheless, the wife of this Wilkinson is Addie, not Mamie. This is not likely to be Dick Lou.

Since the 1930 census was taken in April, 1930, Dick Lou/Virgil would be, at that time, 30 years old. The census records for Lou/Virgil Wilkinson give his age as 10/12 (1900), 10 (1910), 20 (1920), and 32 (1930). For his World War I registration, Virgil gave a birth date of 4/27/1900. In Grundy County (Pelham, a few miles away), Kirby Brock witnessed a marriage between Virgil Wilkinson and Mamie Wilkinson on 6/24/1917. These two, however, are listed as single in 1920. Perhaps they did not reveal their marriage until later.

Wilkinson, Maymie: b. 1895, d. ? d/o Henry Wilkinson

CENSUS RECORDS

1900 Coffee County, Tennessee, Civil District 12, household 145

Wilkinson, Harry	Head	M	B	Feb 1844	56	Married	Farmer
Martha	Wife	F	B	Apr 1855	45	Married	
Ann	Dau	F	B	Jan 1877	23	Widow	
Ola	Dau	F	B	Sep 1881	18	Single	
Ellis	Son	M	B	Oct 1886	13	Single	

Elisha	Son	M	B	Dec 1888	11	Single
Rice	Son	M	B	Feb 1892	8	Single
Wade	Son	M	B	Feb 1893	7	Single
Mark	G-son	M	B	May 1898	2	Single
Lou	G-dau	F	B	Jul 1899	10/12	Single

1910 Coffee County, Tennessee, Civil District 12, household 153

Wilkinson, Harrison	Head	M	B	68	Widower	Farmer
Mattie	Dau	F	Mu	28	Single	
Virgil	G-son	M	Mu	10	Single	
Bettie	G-dau	F	Mu	7	Single	

1920 Coffee County, Tennessee, Civil District 12, household 76

Wilkinson, Harrison	Head	M	B	79	Widower	Farm laborer
Virgil	G-son	M	B	20	Single	
Mamie	G-dau	F	B	22	Single	

1930 Coffee County, Tennessee, Civil District 12, household 171

Wilkinson, Virgil	Head	M	Neg	32	Married	Farmer
Mamie	Wife	F	Neg	27	Married	

1930 Coffee County, Tennessee, Civil District 11, household 126

Wilkinson, L...*	Head	M	Neg	29	Married	Farmer
Addie	Wife	F	Neg	23	Married	
Jamie	Son	M	Neg	3	Single	
George	Son	M	Neg	2 1/12	Single	
Horace	Son	M	Neg	1/12	Single	

* The spelling of this Wilkerson's first name is unclear.

Donald L. Hill
June 14, 2011
