

The senseless killing of Claud Wheeler, pt. 1

It's been noted recently that a new book, "Wicked Western Kentucky," by Richard Parker contains a wicked event that happened here in Marion. It was the senseless killing of a young Claud Wheeler.

The Buckskin Bill's Wild West Show had traveled to Marion on the train, and set up their wild west show on land that belonged to Claud Wheeler. It was on the area by the railroad tracks between East Depot Street and East Bellville Street. Here's what happened from the archives of The Crittenden Press, Aug. 9, 1900.

enacted within the glare of the torchlight, and no man now in Marion, or likely to be here, saw the origin or the finale.

The Story, as gathered from those who saw portions of the fight is as follows:

From five to a dozen of the cowboys were on and about the raised walk at the depot when Wheeler reached there, a few words passed and the shooting began; the witnesses are not sure as to who fired the first shot; not more than one or two shots were fired before Wheeler was down; he crawled under a wagon, his antagonists surrounded the wagon and began shooting at him. He was dragged from under the wagon and beat over the head with a club.

Shortly afterwards he was found some 30 feet from the wagon in a dying condition and in a few minutes he was dead. There was a gunshot wound in each hand, the bullet striking the hand and ranging upward in the arms, there was a gunshot wound in his side, the ball having penetrated the lung, the skull was cracked on top near the front, and on top near the rear, as if he had been struck a powerful blow with a heavy club.

Shortly after the shooting, having completed loading, the show train pulled out. When picked up, Wheeler's gold watch, a present from his mother, was gone and his watch pocket was cut out, his pistol was gone, too. Two of the showmen had gunshot wounds dressed in Princeton; one was wounded in the neck and the other in the foot, neither seriously.

The next morning county Judge Rochester summoned a jury and held an inquest over the dead body of Mr. Wheeler. The jury returned the following verdict: We the jury impaneled to hold an inquest over the dead body of Claud Wheeler do return into court the following verdict:

We are of the opinion that the said Claud Wheeler came to his death by a pistol shot or shorts fired from the hands of persons known as the cowboys,



This is the advertisement for Buckskin Bill's Wild West Show that appeared in The Press.

going with Terrell Bros., or Buckskin Bill's Wild West show, that said killing occurred about 12 o'clock Aug. 3, 1900, in Marion, Crittenden County Ky., and that said killing was not done in self-defense, but was done with malice aforethought.

This 4th day of Aug. 1900 - G. D. Summerville, J. T. Cochran, D. G. Bettis, J. A. Farmer, J. M. Freeman, Walter Clement.

Witnesses testify: Several witnesses were examined in the inquest, and the story of the killing as told by these is as follows:

Curg Travis - Was at depot. Saw the killing. Was there when Wheeler came. Heard pistol fire; just after first shot heard sound as of licks being struck; turned round and saw Claud's heels fly up; he fell backwards and crawled or somehow got under a wag-

on; Heard one of the cowboys say, I am wounded, but don't think badly.

There were other words passed and they surrounded the wagon and began shooting, and walking around the wagon as they shot. One of the showmen came up to me and said; "My friend, what business have you got here; you had better go and go pretty fer." I went. I went as far as Mr. Hurley's and then went back. When I got near Robinson's met Joel Farmer and he said, "they have killed Claud Wheeler." I went on where Claud was, he died soon afterwards. It looked to me like there were 20 in the crowd; there were some Indians. I do not know who it was that caught me by the arm. He had a pistol; it was a big one. It was about this long, measuring off about two and a half feet on his

arm. I could tell that it was Claud when they were firing at him. There were only torchlights. I could not hear anything that Claud said.

I could not identify the man who caught hold of me as I was looking at that pistol.

Ed Doss - I work in the telegraph office at the depot. I was in the office when the trouble came up. The first shot attracted my attention. I turned around and saw a man dressed as a rough-rider cross the railroad to the platform in front of the railroad office with a pistol. One man cried out, "Come we are going to be attacked." Then I got back into the office and lay down on the floor. I heard seven or eight shots fired. I did not see Claud Wheeler.

There was a big crowd and they seemed to be rushing toward the depot. I saw pistols; the man had on a cowboy hat; I could not identify him; I could not tell how many were shooting but could hear the shots; I could not tell who they were shooting at; I did not see them hit

Claud.

After the shooting I first saw Claud in front of Mr. Robertson's; in seven or eight minutes further came down to the depot, came into the office and said that they had killed Claud. He went out where the cowboys were and when I got out there he was gone.

Yes, I saw the cowboy's pistol and heard one fellow remark, "There goes the d_s_b_". Just after the shooting I saw a man walk up to another man and ask if he was hurt. The man said he was; he was a spare made man, he was wounded in the neck; he said, "they have wounded Kenny." It must have been 10 minutes after the killing.

In Part II next week, the testimonies continue and the result of the trial will be told.

(Brenda Underdown is chair of Crittenden County Historical Society and a member of Crittenden County Genealogical Society. Much more local history can be found at OurForgottenPassages.blogspot.com.)



Brenda Underdown
County Historian

Forgotten Passages

The Killing

The people of Marion heard the discharge of firearms so constantly last Friday, that a volley at the depot about 12 o'clock attracted no particular attention, yet this discharge of arms meant the death of one of our citizens.

The Wild West show had a big crowd that day, and up to nightfall matters had moved along fairly well for an occasion of that kind. At the night performance there was some friction between the show and other parties.

Later in the night, two young men, Lon Agee and Will Ward, came up town and they were badly bruised and beaten about the head and face and were bleeding profusely.

They reported that while near the mill on this side of the show ground, they had been attacked by a party of show attaches and knocked down without any provocation on their part. Ward said that he was knocked down four times, and the condition of his face indicated it. Agee had been just as roughly treated.

Among those who heard this statement of these boys was Mr. Claud Wheeler, a young man born and reared here, the son of Mr. Frank Wheeler and a grandson of the late W. C. Carnahan. Wheeler was incensed at the treatment that young Ward and Agee had received and proposed that a party go and square accounts with the showmen.

He finally went to the depot and there met a number of the "cowboys" of the show, and what followed will probably never be accurately told, because the tragedy was

PUBLIC NOTICE

Kentucky State Board of Elections offers to voters an online portal at GoVote.ky.gov from Saturday, April 4 to Tuesday, May 5 in order to allow requests for a mail-in absentee ballot for the primary election. This is for voters unable to vote in person during the election period. Voters must attest to their reason for being unable to appear in person. Ballots may also be requested during the same period by contacting the Office of Crittenden County Clerk weekdays 8-4:30 at 270-965-3403. Be prepared with your Social Security number and/or driver license number.

This notice given pursuant to Kentucky statutes

GoVote.ky.gov

To request a mail-in ballot for the upcoming primary election

PUBLIC NOTICE

Crittenden County Board of Elections will offer a drop box for deposit of excused mail-in absentee ballots for the primary election for voters choosing to not mail their ballot back to the Office of Crittenden County Clerk. Ballots must be sealed just as if they were being mailed. The drop box will be located inside Crittenden County Office Complex, 200 Industrial Dr., Marion, and available weekdays 8-4:30.

As required by statute, the drop box will be under 24/7 camera surveillance and clearly marked.

This notice given pursuant to Kentucky statutes

GoVote.ky.gov

To request a mail-in ballot for the upcoming primary election

Real Estate LISTINGS

HOMES

506 N College St. - \$77,900
2 BR, 1 Bath

247 Guess Dr. - \$249,000
4 BR, 2 Bath

117 Broadway St. - \$299,000
3 BR, 1 Bath

122 West Lake St., Madisonville - \$239,900
3 BR, 3 Bath

4025 Aunt Jane Tabernacle Rd. - \$595,000
5 BR, 3 Bath on 101 AC

ACREAGE

54 AC- S.R. 91 N. corner of Aunt Jane Tabernacle Rd.
\$272,900

COMMERCIAL

433 S. MAIN - known as DUNCAN'S SERVICE CENTER
\$625,000

HOMESTEAD

AUCTION REALTY

CALL US ANYTIME
(270) 965-9999
Principal Broker: DARRIN TABOR
www.homesteadauctionrealty.com

How to vote!

Crittenden County

2026

PRIMARY ELECTION



IN-PERSON ELECTION DAY

Tuesday, May 19
Polls are open 6 a.m.-6 p.m.

Countywide Voting Center
Crittenden County Office Complex
200 Industrial Dr., Marion
Any Voter

Repton Baptist Church
6280 U.S. Hwy. 60 E., Marion
A101 Mattoon

Deer Creek Baptist Church
69 Deer Creek Road, Marion
B101 Sheridan

Mexico Baptist Church
175 Mexico Road, Marion
E101 Mexico + C101 Frances

Shady Grove Fire Department
35 Providence Road, Marion
F101 Shady Grove



IN-PERSON EARLY VOTING

Thursday, May 14
8 a.m.-4 p.m.

Friday, May 15
8 a.m.-4 p.m.

Saturday, May 16
8 a.m.-4 p.m.

County Office Complex
200 Industrial Dr., Marion
Fiscal court meeting room

DEADLINE TO REGISTER TO VOTE IS APRIL 20

REGISTER AT GoVote.ky.gov



IN-PERSON EXCUSED ABSENTEE VOTING

May 6-8, 11-13
8 a.m.-4 p.m.

Crittenden County Clerk
200 Industrial Dr., Ste. B, Marion

NO VOTING MONDAY, MAY 18

Voter requirements to be absentee-eligible:

Per KRS 117.085, eligible voters must meet one of the requirements:

- Student who resides temporarily outside of his/her county
- Voter or voter's spouse who has surgery/hospitalization scheduled during Early Voting and Election Day
- Uniformed service member confined to a military base during Early Voting and Election Day and is not eligible for a mail-in ballot
- Voter in last trimester of pregnancy
- Voter who temporarily resides outside the state but is still eligible to vote in Kentucky.
- Voter who due to age, disability or illness will be unable to visit Early Voting or Election Day polling sites.
- Voters who will be out of the county during Early Voting or on Election Day.



EXCUSED ABSENTEE MAIL-IN BALLOT

Eligible voters may request a mail-in absentee ballot by visiting **GoVote.ky.gov**

or by calling 270-965-3403

Request April 4-May 5

To find out if you are an eligible voter, visit GoVote.ky.gov or call 270-965-3403

Process to request mail-in absentee ballot

- Make application on the State Board of Elections' online portal at GoVote.ky.gov or call 270-965-3403.
- Your ballot will be sent via U.S. Mail.
- Follow the instructions completely to ensure your ballot is accepted!

BE SURE TO SIGN BOTH ENVELOPES!

- You may mail it back or use our drop box Crittenden inside Crittenden County Office Complex.

CHECK REGISTRATION, FIND YOUR SAMPLE BALLOT AND VOTING LOCATION ALL AT GoVote.ky.gov

THE PROCESS FOR ALL IN-PERSON VOTING

- Bring your required photo identification.
- Have your ID ready. Driver's licenses are the most efficient method to scan.
- Election officers verify your identity, and you will be issued a paper ballot. Voters with disabilities may use an ADA ballot-marking device which prints a paper ballot to be scanned.