



A wintry downtown Leavenworth around the turn of the twentieth century.

A PUBLIC BURNING: Race, Sex, and the Lynching of Fred Alexander

by Christopher C. Lovett

Leavenworth, Kansas, is a picturesque river town with an assortment of Victorian homes that are opened to the public during Pioneer Days and Christmas. Visitors are impressed by the pristine condition of the historic district. Yet driving along the bluffs above the Missouri and admiring the stately mansions of a bygone era, few would ever imagine what the people of Leavenworth did on a January evening in 1901, when a mob conducted a public burning.

Fred Alexander was lynched on January 15, 1901, after allegations of rape and murder were brought against him. His murder remains a mystery, clouded in myth and urban legend, a tangle of injustice, politics, race relations, and sex. What happened in Leavenworth that evening could have happened elsewhere in Kansas, at a time when the press played upon racial fears and politicians failed to honor their political and ethical responsibilities. Prejudice and injustice were victorious when William Forbes, the murdered girl's father, ignited the match that consumed Fred Alexander in flames. Yet this gruesome lynching mobilized the black community and led African Americans to use all available means to end the vigilante justice that intimidated the state's black citizenry. Petitions had failed to convince state authorities of the legitimacy of black grievances. After the Alexander atrocity, black men were willing to place their hopes in Winchesters and marksmanship. Only then did ropes and faggots cease to be viable forms of racial coercion in Kansas.¹

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1. For a general history of lynchings in Kansas see Genevieve Yost, "The History of Lynchings in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 2 (May 1933): 182–219. Despite slight errors involving dates, Yost's work serves as the benchmark for all those seeking to research vigilantism in Kansas. To place the Alexander lynching within the parameters of the post-Spanish-American-War period see Christopher C. Lovett, "'To Serve Faithfully': The Twenty-Third Kansas Infantry in the Spanish-American War," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 21 (Winter 1998–1999): 256–75. For a brief overview of the Alexander case see Amy L. Water, "Alexander Burned" (unpublished seminar paper, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, 1998), available at the Leavenworth Public Library, Leavenworth, Kansas; Shawn Leigh Alexander, "Vengeance Without Justice, Injustice Without Retribution: The Afro-American Council's Struggle Against Racial Violence," *Great Plains Quarterly* 27 (Spring 2007): 117–33. Though he covered the Alexander lynching, Shawn Alexander's primary focus was the mobilization of black elites into the Afro-American Council in an effort to end racial violence once and for all in Kansas. Recently, Brent M. S. Campney, "W. B. Townsend and the Struggle against Racist Violence in Leavenworth," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 31 (Winter 2008–2009): 260–73, chronicles William Bolden Townsend's courageous efforts to seek justice in the Alexander case and to put an end to lynchings.

The election of 1900 was a war pitting Republicans against "Fusionists," a merger of Populists and Democrats, with no holds barred and no quarter given. It was a conflict that only Peter Finley Dunne, a popular political humorist, could admire, and the conflict was especially fraught in Leavenworth. Colonel Daniel R. Anthony, Sr., the legendary publisher of the *Leavenworth Times*, declared that "fusion as it has existed between democrats and populists is political immorality of the most vicious type." More troubling for the colonel, fusion meant "confusion of principles, the clouding of political conscience."²

The black vote was critical in 1900 and, depending on the turnout, could have thrown the election to either party. During the 1900 presidential election, between incumbent Republican William McKinley and Democrat William Jennings Bryan, black voters had serious reservations about supporting the Republicans because the state party had turned a blind eye to the black community and had failed to advance black political interests. For many African Americans, those affronts were real and were a sign of their inferior status in the eyes of some politicians. Black Republicans waged a relentless campaign to keep black voters in the GOP camp and their most effective technique was warning minority voters that Democrats would disenfranchise them.³

Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill (D., Mass.), former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, once said that "all politics is local," and the year 1900 was no different, except perhaps for its rhetorical intensity, including widespread use of racial fear. A typical weapon employed by the Republicans was to claim Kansas Democrats were nothing more than surrogates for Senator Benjamin R. "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman, the notorious racist from South Carolina. Republicans were so uncertain of the loyalty of African Americans in Leavenworth that the *Times* published an open letter by Sidney Carson, a black farmhand working for the Ryan Livestock and Feed Company, who told blacks, "Every vote cast by a negro for Bryan means an endorsement for the disfranchise-

ment of our colored brothers in the south. Every ballot [for] Bryan . . . by a negro means loss of [our] manhood, honor, and principle."⁴ The most eloquent spokesman for the Republican cause was Leavenworth attorney William B. Townsend, one of the city's two black attorneys. Townsend traveled the state for the GOP and was labeled "one of the leading negro orators of Kansas." Much like Sidney Carson, Townsend's message to blacks was simple: your "fate is trembling in the national balance." He further counseled his audiences in Leavenworth and elsewhere, "The political enemies of the black man propose to undo what has been done" for the black community since Reconstruction.⁵

African Americans sought protection against working-class or poor whites, who viewed blacks as economic competitors. From 1870 through 1900, blacks in rural, eastern Kansas counties had slowly made the trek to urban centers. Republicans believed they needed black votes if they hoped to win the governorship in 1900. If Republicans were to win, especially in Leavenworth, they had to overcome their apparent indifference to the black community.⁶ Leavenworth, like most of the state, was more southern than most Kansans cared to admit, and this was manifest in a rigid system of de jure and de facto segregation. John Waller, a leading black Republican, discovered that truth shortly after his arrival in Leavenworth in 1878. An aspiring politician, Waller realized the white establishment was biased against his race and was so troubled by the black community's acceptance of the status quo he moved to Lawrence, a locality more conducive to his ambitions.⁷ Segregation was a way of life in Leavenworth and, in that, the city was no different from other localities in Kansas at the turn of the century. In public education, Leavenworth

4. "A Word to Colored Men," *Leavenworth Times*, October 9, 1900.

5. "Townsend Writes a Red Hot Letter to Negro voters," (Topeka) *Plaindealer*, October 12, 1900. Townsend also defended Daniel R. Anthony, Jr., in an assault case in July 1899 and served as marshal of the Leavenworth Police Court in 1899.

6. Chafe, "The Negro and Populism," 419. For black depopulation see James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005); Elliot Jaspin, *Buried in Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

7. Randall Woods, "After the Exodus: John Lewis Waller and the Black Elite, 1878-1900," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 43 (Summer 1977): 173-75; see also Woods, *A Black Odyssey: John Lewis Waller and the Promise of American Life 1878-1900* (Lawrence: Regent Press of Kansas, 1981); Woods, "Integration, Exclusion, or Segregation? The 'Color Line' in Kansas, 1878-1900," *Western Historical Quarterly* 14 (April 1983): 181-98. Woods argued in his later article that Kansas was a western state and followed its own road to discrimination, not completely southern and not completely northern.

2. "Fusion and Its Consequences," *Leavenworth Times*, July 6, 1899.

3. For black grievances with Kansas Republicans see William H. Chafe, "The Negro and Populist: A Kansas Case Study," *Journal of Southern History* 34 (August 1968): 402-19. Chafe argued that blacks in Kansas often split their tickets, which infuriated the state's GOP establishment; however, African American complaints against the Republican Party by the end of the 1890s were extensive, ranging from calls by leading Kansas Republicans for sending blacks back to Africa, repeal of the state's civil rights statute, failure to support black Republicans for statewide office, continued school segregation, and the upsurge of racial violence beginning in the 1880s.

had two segregated public schools and a segregated parochial school. In May 1888 the Leavenworth Board of Education kept black students from participating in high school graduation ceremonies with their white peers.⁸ However, many in the black community still held that the GOP would protect them from racial violence.

The white community in Leavenworth, like many in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, also feared sexual contact between the races. By the early twentieth century thirty states had adopted antimiscegenation laws barring interracial marriages, though Kansas was not one of them.⁹ In many respects African American males had to be excessively cautious when they were near white females. However, in Leavenworth's vice district, among the brothels and cribs, whites and blacks interacted more freely. According to court and police records, nearly all the brothels had one or more black females working to fulfill the desires of white patrons. On occasion streetwalkers were arrested with clients of both races, who police often released if they knew the men from walking their beat or frequenting the men's businesses. Sometimes the police afforded similar courtesies to female offenders.¹⁰

Social conservatives feared amalgamation or race mixing would loosen the rigid sexual barriers separating the races. As more black males worked in the red light district as runners or cadets for the city's madams, they became more familiar with white prostitutes. The prospect of black males crossing the color line terrified white males in Leavenworth. Between 1897 and 1899 a new charge appeared in the city's arrest docket,

8. Chafe, "The Negro and Populism," 406.

9. Kansas did have an antimiscegenation law during the territorial period, but it was repealed when Kansas became a state. A serious effort was made in late 1912 and early 1913 to pass an antimiscegenation bill. The bill passed overwhelmingly in the Kansas House, ninety-eight to sixteen; sixty-eight Democrats, twenty-eight Republicans, and two Socialists voted for the measure, with ten members not voting and sixteen Republicans dissenting. It appears that the House leadership allowed the bill to remain open following the vote so others not present could vote, since it passed eighty-three to fifteen according to the cover sheet. The bill, however, never made it out of the Senate Judiciary Committee. At this time, blacks composed only 3.1 percent of the state's population; but racial paranoia was a serious issue in 1913 Kansas, even in some counties with only a marginal black population. See "House Bill No. 19 by Mr. [J.N.] Herr," folder H.B. 19-1913, Legislative Documents, 1913, box 34599, 124-16-05-08, Library and Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka; *Kansas House Journal*, January 23, 1913, 90-91; "White Men Doubt Honor of Their Women," *Plaindealer*, January 24, 1913; "No Stain on the Fair Name of Kansas," *Plaindealer*, January 31, 1913; "Bill Prohibiting Intermarriage of Three Races Passes the House," *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 24, 1913.

10. See City of Leavenworth, Docket of Arrests, 1895-1903, Leavenworth County Historical Society, Leavenworth, Kansas (hereafter cited as "City of Leavenworth, Docket of Arrests").



Fred Alexander, a black Spanish-American War veteran who, upon his return to Leavenworth, frequented the city's seedy neighborhoods and bookie joints, was lynched on January 15, 1901, after he was accused of rape and murder. This drawing of Alexander appeared the next day in the Leavenworth Times' coverage of the lynching.

the charge of "improper conduct." A review of police records demonstrates that the white community's worst fears were coming to fruition.¹¹

In the late summer and fall of 1900, right before the election, rumors spread throughout the city that a number of white females had been sexually assaulted by unknown black males. E. W. Howe of the *Atchison Daily Globe*, writing after Alexander's lynching, put

11. Several crimes were known as "morals charges" in turn-of-the-century Leavenworth: working as an inmate (prostitute) of a house of ill fame, visiting a house of ill fame, maintaining a disorderly house, keeping a house of ill fame, streetwalking, and lewd conduct. "Improper conduct" as a charge was first seen in the early 1890s to explain activities associated with prostitution. After 1897 it was used to explain inappropriate sexual conduct between blacks and whites. In 1897 the police arrested fifteen people for crossing the color line, an additional four in 1898, and two in 1900. See City of Leavenworth, Docket of Arrests, June 1895-September 1898; City of Leavenworth, Docket of Arrests, October 1898-September 1903.

Table 1: Lynching Ratios in Kansas

Decade	Black Male Population	Number of Black Victims	Black Lynching Ratio	White Male Population	White Lynching Victims	White Lynching Ratio
1880s	22,583	8	1:2,822	514,084	21	1:24,480
1890s	25,800	7	1:3,685	726,312	9	1:80,701
1900s	26,542	2	1:13,271	740,922	2	1:370,461
1910s	27,946	0	NA	856,437	1	1:856,437
1920s	29,759	1	1:29,759	878,150	0	NA
1930s	33,980	0	NA	925,826	1	1:925,826

Sources: Genevieve Yost, "History of Lynching in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 2 (May 1933): 182–219; U.S. Census 1880; U.S. Census 1890; U.S. Census 1900; U.S. Census 1910; U.S. Census 1920; U.S. Census, 1930. Yost based her article on lynchings that appeared in the press. There is evidence to suggest that lynchings or illegal killings took place that she did not consider. An example is the death of Miles Baker, an African American in Leavenworth, accused of rape and remanded to the district court in Leavenworth on January 8, 1898. Earlier he was employed at the Riverside mines. Four months after his arrest he died and was buried on April 15 at Mt. Muncie Cemetery with no cause of death listed. Likewise, Ed Fleming and Heck Robinson, two other black residents of Leavenworth accused of rape, disappeared from all public records following their arrest in 1899.

the number of alleged assaults at thirteen. A review of arrest records does not support this claim. Even still the *Leavenworth Times* made no effort to dispel the rumors. When the *Times* reported an alleged October 18, 1900, assault on Ida Benz, a thirty-one-year-old mother who lived with her father, it noted that Benz's screams and the sudden arrival of some white males "put the negro to flight," and concluded, "this is the only instance reported where the fellow became so bold [as] to make an attempt to assault."¹² Even though it reported this was "the only instance," the *Times* and other papers did nothing to refute the popularly held belief that a black male was roaming Leavenworth streets preying upon vulnerable white females.

Such inflammatory rumors had a political purpose. On the one hand, they galvanized blacks to vote Republican in hopes that the GOP would protect them from their traditional enemies who were prone to racial violence. On the other, such rumors helped both parties win

support from working-class and poor whites, who, in addition to fearing interracial sexual contact, saw African Americans as economic competitors. But the provocative rumors, of course, worried the city's black leaders. African Americans knew that unsubstantiated reports of sexual assaults often led to inflamed public passions and racial violence that culminated in lynchings (tables 1 and 2).¹³ The black press, unlike the mainstream papers, articulated the dangers posed by the reckless charges routinely published in the *Times* and *Evening Standard*.¹⁴

On Election Day, November 6, 1900, all was calm. D. R. Anthony, Jr., the business manager for his father's newspaper and the city's postmaster, as well as the nephew of suffragist Susan B. Anthony, met with a black ward heeler about getting out the black vote. There was excitement in the air as Republicans smelled victory. Early in the evening, after work, nineteen-year-old Pearl Forbes decided to go downtown with the revelers, anticipat-

12. *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 17, 1901; Dr. Paul Gempel, interview by Arthur J. Stanley, Jr., January 20, 1976, Leavenworth, Kansas, Leavenworth County Historical Society, Leavenworth; "Negro Attempts to Assault White Girl," *Leavenworth Times*, October 18, 1900. When it covered the Forbes case, the *Evening Standard* reported that other assaults had occurred in the vicinity; see "Victim of a Horrible Crime," (Leavenworth) *Evening Standard*, November 7, 1900. The same article appeared in the *Leavenworth Democratic Standard* on November 9.

13. Leavenworth had lynched Richard Wood for rape on January 30, 1887. Later, Silas J. Wilson was lynched, not for rape, as indicated by Yost, but for conduct with a young white woman deemed "disgusting to the young men in the neighborhood" of Millwood. The lynching occurred near Millwood, located in the northwest corner of Leavenworth County on August 20, 1893. See Yost, "Lynchings in Kansas," 217; "Swung to Death," *Leavenworth Times*, August 20, 1893.

14. *American Citizen* (Kansas City, Kans.), January 18, 1901.

Table 2: Black Lynchings in Kansas by Counties

Decade	County	Number of Black Lynchings	Population Distribution		Percentage of Blacks in the County
			White	Black	
1880s	Crawford	1	16,749	100	.6%
	Douglas	3	18,476	3,217	14.8%
	Labette	2	20,517	2,179	9.5%
	Leavenworth	1	27,383	4,970	15.3%
	Miami	1	16,901	868	4.8%
1890s	Brown	1	19,894	422	2%
	Pawnee	1	5,058	144	2.7%
	Saline	1	16,982	460	2.6%
	Leavenworth	1	34,000	4,465	11.6%
	Crawford	1	29,859	426	1.4%
	Cherokee	2	26,421	1,342	4.8%
1900s	Leavenworth	1	36,299	4,641	11.3%
	Crawford	1	37,152	1,657	4.2%
1920s	Crawford	1	51,172	1,548	2.5%

Sources: Genevieve Yost, "History of Lynchings in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 2 (May 1933): 182–219; U.S. Census 1880; U.S. Census 1890; U.S. Census 1900; U.S. Census 1920.

ing a GOP victory. But the young white woman never returned to the Forbes's residence nor to the home of a friend with whom she often stayed. No one bothered to report her missing. Over the next few days, local papers reported that between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, November 7, 1900, the day after the election, a young black girl, Bessie Dougherty, noticed a bright purple cloth in a ravine near the corner of Lawrence and Spruce. Curious, Bessie descended into the ravine to retrieve the object that had attracted her attention. But the purple item was not a cloth; it was a feather. Looking around she saw something terrifying: a body. She quickly climbed the embankment and ran to tell her aunt, Maggie Anderson. The news traveled quickly in southern Leavenworth and a crowd of onlookers gathered to view the body.¹⁵

Not long afterwards, John Cosgrove and William Forbes were walking down a footpath near the ravine

on their way to work. Cosgrove saw the crowd, looked down, and allegedly told Forbes, "Let's go down and cover it over." As he approached the body, Forbes suddenly stopped. He realized that the body was that of his daughter, Pearl, and purportedly cried, "My God, John, this is my daughter." According to the *Times*, William Forbes "fell to his knees beside the dead girl and wept as only a suffering parent can, repeatedly calling his daughter by name."¹⁶

The *Times* took the lead in covering the story and notified readers that Pearl Forbes worked at a local confection factory near Third and Shawnee. One of the victim's close friends, Mary Johosky, the twenty-eight-year-old daughter of Polish immigrants, told authorities that after work Pearl Forbes often stayed with her, but on the evening of November 6, Forbes decided to go into town and follow the election returns. Johosky told her

15. The first report of Pearl Forbes's death appeared in the *Leavenworth Times* on November 8, 1900, on page four. The *Leavenworth Democratic Standard* moved the Forbes case to the front page on November 9, but other papers, including the *Evening Standard*, had the story on page three.

16. "Dastard's Hellish Deed," *Leavenworth Times*, November 8, 1900; "Foul, Cruel Murder," *Western Life*, November 8, 1900. According to the U.S. Census, 1900, Kansas, Leavenworth County, Leavenworth, Bessie Dougherty was thirteen and the granddaughter of Henry and Anna Smith. She probably notified her grandparents.



Early on the evening of November 6, 1900, nineteen-year-old Pearl Forbes decided to go downtown to join revelers anticipating a GOP victory in the day's election. The young white woman never returned home, and by the next morning her body was discovered lying in a ravine near the corner of Lawrence and Spruce. Months passed and Forbes's killer remained at large. It was not until January 12, 1901, when another local white woman, Eva Roth, was attacked, that Fred Alexander became a suspect in both crimes. Drawing of Forbes from the *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901.

that it would be wise to take the streetcar home, rather than walk, and offered her a nickel for the fare. But Pearl declined and said she would walk home.¹⁷

At the turn of the century the Leavenworth Police did not have the training to conduct a thorough crime scene investigation. The police never sealed the scene and crowds mingled at the site making it impossible to

17. "Dastard's Hellish Deed," *Leavenworth Times*, November 8, 1900.

collect evidence. According to newspaper accounts, the crowds numbered in the thousands with many openly murmuring that the perpetrator should be lynched if and when captured. The police negotiated with officials in Platte City, Missouri, to use their bloodhounds to track the murderer; contamination, however, made that impossible.¹⁸ Without accurate information about the crime, fear and racial animus spread throughout Leavenworth. The rumors that had spread during the summer and early fall of black sexual predators preying on white females contributed to the malicious gossip that Pearl Forbes had been molested because her "underclothing was torn in a manner which denoted that the fiend had assaulted her with the object of committing a dastardly deed."¹⁹ However, local doctors initially refuted popular perceptions by claiming, after their on-site examination, that a sexual assault did not occur. Likewise, the police were working under the assumption that Pearl Forbes's death was murder resulting from a robbery gone awry.

The coroner, Harry W. Koohler, manager of the People's Telephone Company, listed the cause of death as murder, and impaneled a coroner's jury on November 13. The jury was composed of six working-class white males, two of whom worked with William Forbes at the Great Western Stove Company; all but one had young daughters. One of the jurors, John Cosgrove, was a personal friend and coworker of William Forbes and was present when Forbes discovered his daughter's body. Another was the city street commissioner. It was not surprising that the jury rejected the physicians' findings and found that "Pearl Forbes came to her death by strangulation done by some unknown person or persons for the purpose of rape."²⁰ The verdict fanned the flame of anti-black hysteria.

Police Chief Joseph Cranston sought help from neighboring communities, focusing on transients and vagrants as potential suspects. Cranston, who ran a local livery stable, promised that he would "leave no stone unturned to bring the miscreant to justice." Local

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*; Death Register, Leavenworth County, Coroner's Record November 13, 1900, Coroner's Death Record, January 6, 1896–January 15, 1901, 25-08-06-01, Library and Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka. The coroner charged the county \$29.30 for his work on the case as well as \$15.00 each for the supporting physicians. For composition of the coroner's jury see "Dastard's Hellish Deed," *Leavenworth Times*, November 8, 1900; U.S. Census, 1900, Kansas, Leavenworth County, Leavenworth; *Leavenworth City Directory, 1900–1901*.

newspapers, of course, theorized as to the perpetrator's identity and modus operandi, building off of the jury's verdict connecting the murder to a sexual assault. The *Evening Standard* and the *Leavenworth Democratic Standard*, both with ties to Leavenworth's Democratic politicians, claimed that Pearl Forbes was stalked by a predator, who "forced her down into the ravine, outraged her, and [then] killed her."²¹

"Thousands of people," according to the *Times*, visited the Forbes's home at 1302 Grand Avenue to console the family. The *Times* related that a steady "stream of people passed through the house and viewed the remains," where "women wept piteously and strong men could hardly restrain their sobs." Civic and religious organizations attended in "full strength," such as the Knights and Ladies of Security and the Epworth League. The reports of Pearl Forbes's death appeared in all the local papers, but it was especially the *Times* that fomented the public's outrage and escalated the racial prejudice that captivated Leavenworth. Likewise, it was the *Times* that reinvented Pearl Forbes, transforming a wayward young woman into a socialite taken in the prime of life by a black brute. As a result the public, not only in Leavenworth but also in surrounding communities, became enraged and desired vengeance if, and when, a suspect was apprehended.²²

On Wednesday, November 7, Mayor S. F. Neely issued a reward of \$200. This was followed by a governor's proclamation, which offered an additional \$400 to anyone with information that lead to the arrest and conviction of the assailant.²³ Reports reached Leavenworth that a suspect was arrested in Atchison on November 9. The *Times* claimed that "the man went to a farm house and requested the farmer to protect him from violence, admitting that he was a murderer and wished to be placed in jail where he would not be lynched." But the newspapers fabricated and encouraged the assumption that the assailant was black, with no hard evidence to support that supposition, particularly when the *Times* reported "a colored man well known in the southwestern portion of the city who was seen walking west on Spruce



In its coverage of Alexander's lynching, the press created the impression that the man was a large brute. Alexander's military records show that unlike the hulking figure later described as the perpetrator against Pearl Forbes, Alexander stood five feet, four inches tall. Headline, which hints at the lynching to come, taken from the Leavenworth Times, January 14, 1901.

street about the time of the murder . . . is behind bars and . . . he had in his pocket a handkerchief with the initials of the girl on it."²⁴ Like in many police inquiries, rumors and impending arrests proved to be untrue. The police did initially arrest the usual suspects, derelicts, and vagabonds. Yet officials never interviewed either Harry Stevens, who worked in a section of Leavenworth frequented by Pearl Forbes, or Eugene Lewis, who lived within a mile of the crime scene. Both had served lengthy terms in Lansing for rape. Stevens was white, and Lewis was black. Six other sexual offenders lived in the city, but they were never considered suspects and were never questioned about the case.²⁵

21. "Victim of a Horrible Crime," *Evening Standard*, November 7, 1900; "Victim of a Horrible Crime," *Leavenworth Democratic Standard*, November 9, 1900.

22. "Funeral of the Murdered Girl," *Leavenworth Times*, November 9, 1900.

23. Proclamation of Reward, Pearl Forbes Murder, Administration of William E. Stanley, Correspondence File 27-05-07-04, box 8, folder 1: Rewards 1900, Library and Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka (hereafter cited as "Stanley Papers").

24. "Murderer Reported Caught at Atchison," *Leavenworth Times*, November 10, 1900.

25. Kansas State Prison, Inmate Origin List, 1874-1904, 26-13-10-02, Library and Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka.



Alexander was arrested shortly after Eva Roth's attack on January 12, 1901, and his identity was quickly leaked to reporters by the officer working the desk at police headquarters. Even before Roth formally identified Alexander as her assailant, enraged citizens made their way to the city jail, where an increasing mob gathered. As the mob became more agitated, authorities made the decision to move Alexander to the county jail, pictured at bottom right.

The African American community realized that an explosive situation was developing and feared the worst if it was found that the perpetrator was black. The *Times* and other Kansas papers continually reported on crimes allegedly committed by African American males against white females. Such reports became, as noted by historian Philip Dray, a form of "'folk pornography' that made for welcome, titillating reading." Nearly all the reports found in late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century papers are the same: "Stories of sexual assault, insatiable black rapists, tender white virgins, and manhunts led by 'determined men' that culminated in lynchings were the bodice rippers of their day." Thomas Nelson Page, a contemporary southern author and apologist for southern racial violence, argued that "no woman in the South goes alone upon the highway out of sight of white men, except on necessity, and no man leaves his woman alone in his house." Many in Leavenworth strongly agreed with those sentiments.²⁶

26. Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), 4; Thomas Nelson Page, *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 84-85.

The black community was well aware of the dangers posed by the public's irrational racial fears. The *Times* announced that black civic leaders were "as much if not more indignant than the whites because of [the murder]." Reporting on a November 7 meeting of Leavenworth's black leaders, and perhaps putting erroneous words into their mouths, the *Times* claimed that amongst these leaders "it was the consensus of opinion that lynching would be too good for such a fiend and the men who attended the meeting were in favor of taking the fellow from the authorities, if caught, and burning him at a stake at the place where the murder occurred."²⁷ No other paper in Leavenworth reported anything as inflammatory as did the *Times*, which had little in the way of evidence to support its record.

The *Times* also created a new identity for Pearl Forbes. Soon other papers followed suit and this improved picture of the victim transcended generations so that the woman's entire family also took on a newly polished air. Unfortunately, reality was different. Pearl Forbes pushed the envelope of her father's patience on numerous occasions. William G. Forbes was a hard-working husband and provider for his wife and their eight children, ranging in age from four to twenty-two. Two of his daughters, Carrie and Jessie, were teachers in the Leavenworth Public Schools, and a third, Alma, sixteen, was a stenographer at J. V. Stolz, a wholesale grocery. When census enumerator Edwin Singer visited the Forbes home on June 8, 1900, Emma Forbes indicated that Pearl was unemployed at the time. Pearl did manage to find employment by August 1 at the Leavenworth Cracker and Candy Factory.²⁸

Though she officially lived with her parents, Pearl rarely returned to the family home, often staying instead with her coworker Mary Johosky. The records of the Leavenworth Police as early as 1898 indicate that on three separate occasions Pearl was arrested on morals charges. Her first arrest came on May 26, 1898, when she was booked as Pearl Rolfs, the surname of her future employer at the candy factory. On another occasion she was arrested as Pearl Barnes, an alias taken from James Barnes, the superintendent of G. W. Stove Company and her father's employer. The charges ranged from

27. "Dastard's Hellish Deed," *Leavenworth Times*, November 8, 1900. A mistaken assumption about the lynching of Fred Alexander is based on the view that the vigilante committee was influenced by the burning on November 17, 1900, in Limon, Colorado, of Preston Porter, a Lawrence, Kansas, native. The quote from the *Times* was written nine days before the Colorado lynching and further demonstrates that the Alexander lynching was not a spontaneous event, but a premeditated act.

28. U.S. Census, 1900, Leavenworth County, Leavenworth.

lewd conduct to streetwalking. This may explain why there was no listing for Pearl Forbes in the *City Directory* or job listing for her in the 1900 federal census. For his part, William Forbes was seemingly distraught by his daughter's behavior, since there is no evidence that he came to the jail to pay her bond. Her arrests and their causes were uncharacteristic of his other daughters and a serious breach of acceptable behavior in the late nineteenth century.²⁹

In addition to painting a beautiful picture of Pearl Forbes, the press created the impression that Fred Alexander was a large man and a brute, who was a threat to white women in Leavenworth. Unfortunately, the historical record reveals little information about the accused. The youngest son of his parents, Alexander enlisted on May 24, 1898, at the age of twenty-one for service in the Spanish-American War. Military records show that unlike the hulking figure later described as the perpetrator against Pearl Forbes, Alexander stood five feet, four inches tall. He served eight months before he was discharged with the rank of private on January 31, 1899, at Fort Huachuca, Arizona Territory. His conduct was listed as "good," and he appeared not to be a troublemaker during his short enlistment.³⁰ But after his service, Alexander returned a different person. He did not concern himself with the dangers lurking as he walked through the infamous Klondike, a section of south Leavenworth renowned for gambling, drinking, and prostitution, or through the upscale red light district in downtown Leavenworth. He never felt confined by the slave experience of his parents, and never accepted the tenets of Jim Crow. Either consciously or unconsciously he pushed the bounds of acceptability by chatting with many of the white prostitutes who worked the streets and he may have served as a part-time cadet, procuring customers for the city's madams for a fee. He frequented the bookie joints in Leavenworth, so it is altogether possible that Alexander was already known to the city's police. To some in Leavenworth, Fred Alexander was a symbol of everything they feared about the black community. His immolation was a gruesome lesson to blacks of the dangers of challenging society's racial taboos.

29. Entry no. 68, p. 184, May 26, 1898, City of Leavenworth, Docket of Arrests, 1895–1898; Entry no. 56, p. 51, January 21, 1900, and entry no. 51, p. 66, June 21, 1900, City of Leavenworth Docket of Arrests, 1899–1903.

30. Register of Enlistments, United States Army, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1898, p. 5, Register of Enlistments in the U.S. Army, 1798–1914, in National Archives Microfilm Publication M233, 81 rolls; Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s–1917, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Two months passed and Pearl Forbes's killer remained at large. Racial tensions remained high, and when in January a white woman was assaulted in broad daylight on a city street, the situation became increasingly dangerous. The immediate events leading to the Alexander lynching began to unfold in the pages of the *Leavenworth Times* and *Evening Standard* on January 13, 1901. The latter newspaper, which had effectively become a *Times* evening edition after it was purchased by Colonel Anthony in early November 1900, reported "a Negro attempted to criminally assault Miss Eva Roth . . . on her way home from work" at approximately 6:40 p.m. on Saturday, January 12, 1901. Eva Roth, who was the twenty-two-year-old daughter of John Roth, a local stonemason, was returning to her parents' home at 804 South Broadway from her job as a seamstress. The Roth residence was a few blocks from the Alexander home at 517 South 10th Street; in all likelihood, Alexander and Roth routinely passed each other on the street. According to the *Evening Standard*, "her screams brought help before [the attacker] could accomplish his purpose, but not before the fiend had thrown her to the ground, and choked her almost into insensibility." The *Times* noted that Roth had identified her assailant as Fred Alexander.³¹

The local high school principal, W. A. Evans, heard Roth's shriek. He rushed outside and saw the assailant flee in the direction of Chestnut Street. Evans immediately called the police and told the desk sergeant of the attack. John Rollins, an elderly African American, and his daughter, Nora, told the *Times* that at about that time Alexander stopped at the Rollin's house and allegedly told Rollins that he heard a woman scream. When Rollins went outside to investigate, Alexander fled. The police responded quickly and dispatched Officer Michael J. McDonald to the scene to arrest Fred Alexander. McDonald noticed Alexander walking down the east side of Chestnut Street with his head down. According to published accounts, McDonald said, "Hello Fred, is that you?" When Alexander responded, he was arrested, and following a scuffle was booked into the city jail.

31. Editorial, *Labor Chronicle*, November 10, 1900; "The Story of a Crime," *Evening Standard*, January 14, 1901; U.S. Census 1900, Schedule No. 1—Population, City of Leavenworth, July 11, 1900, 3rd Ward, 2nd Precinct. The *Times* claimed that Eva Roth said a "negro was following her." The paper reported she was so concerned that she stopped at the home of B. C. Clark on Broadway. In early November 1900, Colonel D. R. Anthony had purchased two-thirds of the stock in the *Evening Standard* from Edward Carroll the principal stockholder.



When the mob turned its attention to the county courthouse, just across the street from and connected by a tunnel to the county jail, Sheriff Peter Everhardy decided to move Alexander to the state penitentiary at Lansing. Everhardy, pictured here with his family, was concerned for the prisoner's safety, though he later agreed to have Alexander moved back to the county jail in Leavenworth after the mob threatened violence against his wife and daughters. Photograph courtesy of the Leavenworth County Historical Society.

While at the station, the police searched Alexander and found he was unarmed and had a small piece of copper in his possession.³²

The news of Fred Alexander's arrest spread quickly. Ever since Pearl Forbes's death on the night of November 6, 1900, the police had been pressed to apprehend the murderer, but never found a suitable suspect. After Alexander's lynching, police officials claimed they had a suspect in mind all along and produced an affidavit from "another colored man, who knows Alexander and who met him at sometime between nine and ten o'clock on the night of November 6 in a saloon," where Alexander allegedly said, "I have had one hell of a time this evening and I expect to have another before morning." According to detectives Edward Murphy and Thomas Brady, they went to Alfred Alexander's house on the night of November 6, demanding to see Fred Alexander, although Pearl Forbes's body was not discovered until the following morning. The detectives recalled that

32. "The Story of a Crime," *Evening Standard*, January 14, 1901; City of Leavenworth, Docket of Arrests, January 12–13, 1901.

"great beads of perspiration appeared on [Alexander's] forehead," an indication in their minds of his guilt. After his arrest for the attack on Eva Roth in January, the police maintained that he had a habit of whistling, which implicated him in other attacks on other white women.³³ As soon as Ferris K. Taylor, working the desk at police headquarters, received the call of Alexander's identification, he leaked the information to reporters staking out the police station.³⁴

On Saturday evening, though most stores were closed, news of Alexander's apprehension spread quickly among interested parties. Even before Eva Roth formally identified Fred Alexander as her assailant, enraged citizens made their way to the police station, where officers told reporters that Alexander was the long-sought murderer of Pearl Forbes. The papers attempted to reinforce this interpretation by reporting that the police were providing protection for John Rollins and his family, the prime witnesses in the case.³⁵ Suddenly Leavenworth was fully mobilized and as the crowd increased, there were calls for taking the jail by storm. At this early stage, the mob numbered approximately one thousand angry, vengeful citizens. With each passing minute, the mob grew larger. The *Evening Standard* knew what the mob wanted, namely to take the man out and lynch him: "a working man . . . invested his hard earned money in a rope. . . [held] his purchase aloft and cried to the people: 'I am here for the same purpose you men are.'"³⁶

As the mob became more agitated, the authorities made the decision to move Alexander. Some in the police department thought they could outmaneuver the mob by transferring Alexander to the county jail. Officer Evans escorted Alexander via a side door to a waiting police wagon for the short trip to the county lockup. The *Times* reported members of the mob did not believe that Alexander had been transferred until they were given access to the city jail. While in the jail, the mob found Charles Letcher, a local African-American exhibitionist, or as the *Times* called him, "the Negro insulter of

33. "Murder of Pearl Forbes," *Leavenworth Chronicle*, January 15, 1901. The publisher of the *Leavenworth Chronicle* was S. F. Neely, the mayor of Leavenworth. This article was designed to frame an argument for the coming lynching.

34. "The Story of the Crime," *Evening Standard*, January 14, 1901.

35. *Ibid.*; a review of the *Leavenworth City Directory, 1900–1901* reveals there were nearly two thousand telephones in Leavenworth.

36. "The Story of the Crime," *Evening Standard*, January 14, 1901. Harry W. Koehler, the county coroner, who many in the black community suspected of participating in the lynching, may well have used his position as manager of the People's Telephone Company to disseminate the news that Alexander was being held in the city jail.



As Alexander was being taken to the state penitentiary at Lansing by carriage, the mob followed in hot pursuit. While Alexander was at the state prison, the mob continued to mobilize in Lansing and Leavenworth, effectively laying the foundation for the lynching. Postcard of the penitentiary courtesy of the Lansing Historical Museum.

women." Letcher, himself a prime suspect in the Forbes assault early on, never realized how close he came to being lynched too. Despite Alexander's removal, the mob continued its vigil well past 11:00 p.m. By then an element of the mob moved to the county jail where it was met by William Forbes, who further fanned the flames of racial hatred by telling the mob: "We must protect our families."³⁷

Even keeping Alexander in the Leavenworth County Jail was not tenable, especially when the mob turned its full attention to the courthouse. Sheriff Peter Everhardy made a snap decision to move Alexander to the state penitentiary at Lansing for the prisoner's own safety. As Alexander was being taken to the state prison by carriage, the mob followed in hot pursuit, arriving shortly before 10:00 p.m. In the less than three hours after his arrest, the leaders of the mob, essentially a vigilante committee, effectively laid the foundation for the lynching by mustering public support in Leavenworth. The Topeka *Plaindealer*, a black newspaper, reported that after Alexander's murder, one black guard, T. E. Tipton, remembered Alexander's arrival at the penitentiary, as "the howling mob arrived composed of

all classes of people, with the tough element, however, predominating."³⁸

Late on Saturday night, while at Lansing, Eva Roth identified Alexander as her assailant. Later on Sunday, Cranston and his detectives made a concerted effort to extract Alexander's confession for the murder of Pearl Forbes. All rumors to the contrary, some of which were reported in the press, Alexander only acknowledged his guilt in the "assault on Miss Roth." But the *Times* reported rumors that Pearl Forbes was gang raped by "a number of negroes [who] were drinking beer in a shanty near Spruce Street and Lawrence Avenue, had choked the girl into insensibility . . . and carried her to the shanty, where each in turn assaulted her." The newspaper left the clear impression that a gang of black brutes still roamed Leavenworth waiting to defile more white women. Even after three hours of "sweating," an early-twentieth-century version of enhanced interrogation techniques, Alexander refused to admit to the murder of Pearl Forbes. "Given time," the *Times* believed, "the negro will confess, as he knows he will be punished no matter what he says."³⁹

38. "Kansas Crime Reviewed," *Plaindealer*, January 15, 1901.

39. "Alexander Still At Penitentiary," *Leavenworth Times*, January 15, 1901; "Death For Him," *Evening Standard*, January 14, 1901.

37. "Fred Alexander Narrowly Escapes Lynching by an Angry, Determined Mob," *Leavenworth Times*, January 13, 1901.

The leaders of the vigilante committee were astonished by how quickly Everhardy reacted in transferring Alexander to Lansing. Now the committee would have to circumvent Warden J. B. Tomlinson and have Alexander returned to county custody. One method used to gain Everhardy's cooperation was to warn him of the dangers his continued intransigence posed to his wife and daughters. The committee wanted the sheriff to assure Tomlinson that Alexander would be safe if he was returned to the county jail. Everhardy realized that regardless of Alexander's guilt or innocence, if his family was to be spared the retribution of the mob, he had to convince Tomlinson to return Alexander to Leavenworth. But Everhardy was not the only official to receive warnings; so did the warden, who lived with his family in Lansing, not far from the prison. After the lynching, Tomlinson wrote Kansas Governor William E. Stanley: "It is true, I think that the life of the sheriff had been threatened." He also told the governor that "threats of personal violence were made against me and against the institution by some of the mob who said they would take him anyhow."⁴⁰

On Sunday evening, January 13, Tomlinson ordered guards at Lansing to return to the prison following dinner. Upon their return they were armed in case the mob attempted to storm the prison. Meanwhile, the *Times*, as well as the other Leavenworth papers, continued to inflame the public. Once the decision was made by the vigilante committee to lynch Fred Alexander, city officials authorized Joel Brooks and his son, Leavenworth's official billposters, to cover the city with announcements of the forthcoming lynching.⁴¹ The effort was so effective that a mob of five hundred or more appeared before the penitentiary later in the day on January 13. Kansas City public transportation aided the mob by providing free transportation from Leavenworth to Lansing, claiming that it was impossible to collect tickets. Without identifying any of the vigilante leaders, the *Times* and her sister paper, the *Evening Standard*, reported that one of the leaders demanded admission to the prison, and threatened to dynamite the facility if the warden failed to comply.⁴² As the mob began to deploy, prison

officials called Everhardy and told him to come to the prison and disperse the mob. Tomlinson did his best to dissuade the mob from attempting an assault, but the mob began pulling up rails from the nearby Santa Fe Railway tracks to breach the prison gate. The situation was deteriorating beyond the control of the warden and sheriff.

During those critical hours, either Tomlinson or his deputy, W. A. Thomson, contacted the governor's office and informed Stanley's staff of the crisis in Lansing. For all practical purposes, the mob besieged the prison, with lookouts manning all potential exits to ensure that Alexander could not be transported to safety again. According to the *Times*, as tensions intensified the mob was told that "Governor Stanley had wired the warden to demand that Sheriff Everhardy remove Alexander at once." Whether or not the governor gave such a directive is unconfirmed, though he did notify Major General S. M. Fox to issue a warning order for Company H in Lawrence and Company A in Topeka, elements of the First Regiment of the Kansas National Guard. Fox's order then was clear: "Mobilize your company, and hold in readiness for orders to move."⁴³ Even still, the governor did not immediately send the National Guard to Lansing or Leavenworth and this perhaps sealed Alexander's fate.

As the men of Company H and Company A were being called to their armories, negotiations were in progress between Warden Tomlinson, Sheriff Everhardy, and Mayor Neely concerning the procedures for Alexander's arraignment. On the afternoon of Monday, January 14, they met for over two hours in an attempt to appease Tomlinson's apprehensions about releasing Alexander to county custody. All of the city's media outlets referred to the discussions, though they did not result in a plan that would guarantee Alexander's security. A report in the January 15 morning edition of the *Times*, published just hours before the lynching, was prophetic: "Once in the hands of the mob Fred Alexander's life would be only of short duration."⁴⁴ Judge James H. Gillpatrick, the local district judge who would have presided over Alexander's trial had it happened, realized that too. Sometime during the morning or the early afternoon of Monday, January 14, he called the governor's office and warned him of the dangers posed by the return of

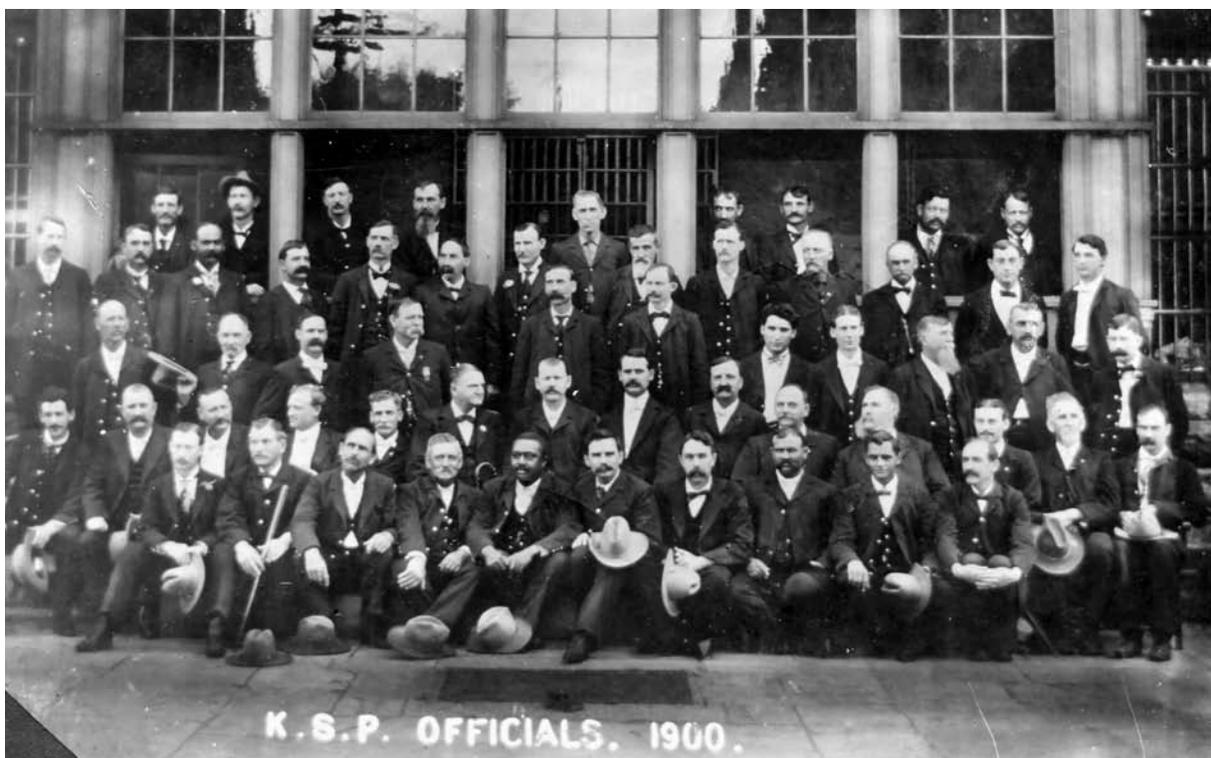
40. J. B. Tomlinson to W. E. Stanley, January 19, 1901, 27-05-06-06, box 3, folder 13, Stanley Papers; "Death for Him," *Leavenworth Evening Standard*, January 14, 1901.

41. "Everywhere Condemned," *Leavenworth Times*, January 23, 1901. Brooks's office was located a few doors from the *Times* offices.

42. "Alexander Still At Penitentiary," *Leavenworth Times*, January 15, 1901.

43. S. M. Fox to Elliot F. Hook, January 15, 1901, *Thirteenth Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas* (Topeka: W. Y. Morgan State Printer, 1902), 54-55.

44. "Alexander Still At Penitentiary," *Leavenworth Times*, January 15, 1901; "Death for Him," *Leavenworth Evening Standard*, January 14, 1901.



One black guard at Lansing, T. E. Tipton, remembered Alexander's arrival, as "the howling mob arrived composed of all classes of people, with the tough element, however, predominating." Tipton is pictured here (middle, first row) with other Kansas State Prison officials in 1900. Photograph courtesy of the Lansing Historical Museum.

Alexander to Leavenworth. The judge also sent a letter to Stanley, cautioning the governor: "I hope no effort will be made to have the offender brought to this city at present." Clearly Gillpatrick was frightened, because so many "reputable people" offered their silent consent to vigilante justice. As strongly as possible, the judge advised Stanley that "to go through the ordinary form of arraignment of this man. . . . [is] to invoke mob violence, it seems to me."⁴⁵

The standoff continued from Sunday, January 13 through Monday, January 14, as the mob stood vigil at Lansing and county officials were in negotiations with the warden. At approximately 3:00 p.m. on January 15, Everhardy signed a statement for Tomlinson assuring the warden that he would guarantee "the life and body of said Alexander," and he took charge of his prisoner for a return to the Leavenworth County jail. Within an hour, despite the warnings from Gillpatrick, the adjutant general's headquarters informed Captain W. S. Eberle, the commanding officer of Company A, that "the trouble

45. James H. Gillpatrick to William E. Stanley, January 15, 1901, 27-05-06-06, box 3, folder 13, Stanley Papers.

seemed to be over and to dismiss the company." Captain Hook with Company H was waiting with his men to move from the armory to the station for the short trip to Lansing, when he too was informed to stand down.⁴⁶

As the *Atchison Daily Globe* noted, "The lynching at Leavenworth is delayed, but it will be pulled off as soon as Yaw Alexander, the Negro, arrested for the attempted assault, is taken from the penitentiary back to town." Everyone, including Tomlinson, knew what was going to happen when Everhardy returned with his prisoner. Alexander, according to the *Times*, told the warden, "Tell my people and friends good bye if I should not happen to see them all, that I am not the guilty man. I thank you gentlemen a thousand times for what you have done for me."⁴⁷ Word of Alexander's impending arrival spread quickly throughout the city as a mob numbering in the thousands descended on the jail.

46. "Reports Pertaining to Riot at Leavenworth, Kansas, January 15, 1901," in *Thirteenth Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1901-1902* (Topeka: W. Y. Morgan State Printer, 1902), 55.

47. "Leavenworth Hungers for a Hanging," *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 15, 1901; "Alexander Burned," *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901.



JOSEPH B. TOMLINSON.

Throughout the standoff with the mob outside the penitentiary at Lansing, Kansas State Prison Warden J. B. Tomlinson, above, attempted to protect his prisoner. Under continued pressure from the mob and after hours of negotiations with other law officials, Tomlinson released Alexander back into Everhardy's custody for return to Leavenworth on January 15, after the sheriff assured him that "the life and body of said Alexander" would be guaranteed.

Rumors were also rampant on January 15 that there would be an attempt by blacks to free Alexander following his release from Lansing. They were more than rumors, in fact, and when Everhardy saw some 120 blacks approaching the jail, he ordered his deputies to disarm them. But some whites wanted not only to lynch Fred Alexander, but also to have a final reckoning with the black community as a whole. Neely's paper, the *Chronicle*, argued, "There are more than Alexander who needs the rope." Some members of the mob feared that armed African Americans would turn a "Gatling gun [on] the crowd." Now Everhardy faced not only a lynching, but the possibility of a race war in Leavenworth. Whether a limited number of armed blacks could have stopped the lynching is open to debate; however, after the lynching R. J. Bright and James E. Washington of Leavenworth wrote Stanley and wanted to know why the sheriff disarmed them,

when he proved incapable of protecting the prisoner. They beseeched the governor to do something.⁴⁸

Everhardy returned to the county jail with Alexander by 3:45 p.m., and according to *Western Life*, a mob of nearly six thousand was waiting in anticipation.⁴⁹ Everhardy sought to confuse the mob by bringing a second wagon to the jail. If the mob attacked the second wagon, Everhardy planned to secure Alexander in the jail before the mob realized the ruse. But the horde would not be deceived a second time, particularly when their quarry was in sight. The mob stormed the jail between 4:15 and 4:30 p.m. Everhardy and his deputies attempted to keep the mob at bay, but the deputies' loyalty was in doubt, particularly that of the jailer, Patrick "Doc" Kennedy. Before Everhardy could effectively respond, the mob quickly gained entrance through a side door, while another component battered its way into the jail through the main entry.

Everhardy then moved Alexander through a tunnel connecting the county jail to the courthouse, thereby keeping him out of the mob's hands one more time. Deputies and the jailer were privy to Everhardy's plans, and some may have betrayed the sheriff to the vigilante committee, because the mob stormed the courthouse too. When the mob finally located Alexander, they used a sledgehammer to break the lock on his cell. As soon as members of the mob entered Alexander's cell, they attacked him with a hatchet, inflicting serious wounds. They then dragged Alexander outside onto the courthouse grounds.⁵⁰ The lynching was about to begin.

What happened next is open to debate. All accounts of the lynching of Fred Alexander derive from the *Times* and associated papers, which had reporters at the scene. Other papers quoted liberally from the *Times* concerning the lynching. But the *Times* had its own agenda, having promoted the lynching, and the proceedings were so ghastly that it appears the paper modified its account of what actually transpired. Normally lynch mobs sought a confession from the victim in order to justify what they were about to do. According to the *Times*, the mob

48. "Colored Man Burned," (*Wichita Searchlight*, January 19, 1901; "Murder of Pearl Forbes," *Leavenworth Chronicle*, January 15, 1901; R. J. Bright and J. E. Washington to William E. Stanley, January 22, 1901, 27-05-06-06, box 3, folder 13, Stanley Papers. Bright was twenty-nine years old and worked at Leavenworth Paving and Brick. Washington was a twenty-nine-year-old widower and was an unskilled laborer.

49. "Burned at the Stake," *Western Life*, January 17, 1901.

50. "Alexander Burned," *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901. There is a strong possibility that Everhardy's plans were leaked to the vigilante committee. A prime suspect was the jailer, Patrick Kennedy, who was, no doubt, influenced by his ties to the Irish-American community.

demanding of Alexander: "Confess before we harm you." Alexander repeated what he had told the authorities in Lansing: "I have nothing to confess." Although the Leavenworth papers later reported that the increasingly angry mob extracted postmortem "relics," the condition of physical evidence from Alexander's body taken to the Kansas Historical Society in Topeka for preservation after the lynching suggests that the man had yet to be burned when he was mutilated. There were hints of this barbarism—including castration—in the *Times*: "My God men,' [Alexander] cried in his agony. 'I have told you that I am innocent. I can't tell you more. I didn't do it.'"⁵¹

Almost according to script, an aggrieved loved one appeared in order to conduct the coup de grace. The murder victim's father, William Forbes, appeared at the courthouse and told the mob: "Don't hang the brute, men don't hang him. Let's take him out where he murdered my daughter and burn him."⁵² The mob then took its prisoner to the site of Pearl Forbes's death at Lawrence and Spruce. Following the wagon carrying Alexander, according to news reports, "wagons of every description raced [down] Delaware and Cherokee streets" like the opening of Oklahoma Territory. "Women with babies in their arms, women pushing [baby carriages], little boys and girls raced along the sidewalks as if wild with frenzy." The locals cheered as the mob and entourage passed on their way to the execution site. The *Times* may not have exaggerated the public's response, because one witness, Paul Gempel, recalled years later that the local YMCA was empty that afternoon, and when he asked, "Where's everybody?," he was told they were going to lynch Fred Alexander. By the time Gempel arrived at the scene, he estimated that five thousand people were present and "nobody seemed to make any attempt to stop it."⁵³

About 5:10 p.m. the mob arrived at the ravine with Alexander in tow. The scene was well choreographed

with everything at hand for the burning, including the iron rail that would be used as a stake. The mob took the rail and placed it in the center of the ravine, then chained the victim to it. A Standard Oil tanker was at the ready. A call was made for William Forbes to come forward. "Let Forbes chain him," the mob yelled and Pearl Forbes's father made the final effort to secure Alexander to the rail. Even at this late hour, and knowing he was about to die, Alexander still refused to confess. The mob grew increasingly impatient, and many began to shout, "Put a match to him." William Forbes then asked Alexander if he knew who had killed his daughter. Alexander responded, "I don't know, I don't know," and warned Forbes that "you'll be sorry someday" when the real culprit was found. Buckets of kerosene from the tanker were poured on him, as the mob demanded, "Throw it on the nigger." Witnesses estimated his executioners used twenty-two gallons to drench Alexander. When Alexander was thoroughly soaked, William Forbes struck the match and engulfed him in flames.⁵⁴

Nearly three hours after the burning, at approximately 8:00 p.m., police officials and the county coroner went to the scene to retrieve Alexander's remains. The charred and mutilated body was placed in a plain wooden coffin by the coroner, Harry W. Koohler, Officer William Evans, and Detective Edward Murphy. They took the coffin to Sexton's funeral parlor, where a large crowd entered the building to look at the remains. The *Times* claimed that relic hunters disfigured Alexander's body as his mother and sister looked on.⁵⁵ However, the records indicate it is highly unlikely that all the mutilations happened post mortem. Koohler did not authorize an autopsy, ruling the death was at the hands of "parties unknown." The body was quickly buried in Potter's field at Mount Muncie Cemetery, not far from the grave of Pearl Forbes.

It did not take long before the finger pointing started. Governor Stanley placed the blame for the lynching squarely on Everhardy. The governor claimed that "the sheriff of Leavenworth is either a despicable scoundrel or a despicable coward," and added, "there was no reason in the world that the negro should not have been protected to the last. The whole military power

51. "Alexander Burned," *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901; the *Atchison Daily Globe* reported that following the lynching a delegation from Leavenworth traveled to Topeka to give Alexander's ear to the historical society. According to the account, the adjectives "burned or charred" were not included in the description. The *Daily Globe* provided the names of those in the delegation: Michael Przyblowicz, the Leavenworth City Clerk; John Mischefzky, who worked at Abernathy Manufacturing; and John Suwalski. According to the *Daily Globe*, this delegation "left for Topeka today, to present a valuable relic; the ear of Yaw Alexander, the negro burned at the stake Tuesday night." *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 17, 1901.

52. The events of January 15, 1901, largely followed the earlier proscriptions of the *Times*. On November 8, 1900, for instance, one day after the body of Pearl Forbes was discovered, the *Times* wrote that a mob should take the perpetrator "from the authorities, if caught, and burn him at the stake where the murder occurred."

53. "Alexander Burned," *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901; Gempel interview.

54. "Colored Man Burned At The Stake in Kansas," *Searchlight*, January 19, 1901; "Alexander Burned," *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901.

55. "Alexander Burned," *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901; *Leavenworth City Directory, 1900-1901* (Leavenworth: Samuel Dodsworth Book Co., 1900), 240.



Judge James H. Gillpatrick, above, was the local district judge who would have presided over Alexander's trial had it happened. Gillpatrick called Governor William E. Stanley's office on January 14 to warn him of the dangers posed by the return of Alexander to Leavenworth. "To go through the ordinary form of arraignment of this man," he argued in a follow up letter to the governor, is "to invoke mob violence, it seems to me."

of the state would have been devoted to the effort and the sheriff knew it all the time."⁵⁶ Stanley argued that if he had known the actual situation in Leavenworth, the National Guard would have been sent, but he claimed Everhardy assured him that the crisis was under control. Even still, Stanley had received a very different picture of the seriousness of the situation in Leavenworth from Judge Gillpatrick, who contacted the governor before the lynching. Stanley received Gillpatrick's warnings before the mob took hold of Alexander, as is evidenced by the response he sent Gillpatrick. The judge, perhaps for the historical record, sent an additional letter to Stanley, cautioning the governor of the potential for violence if Alexander was returned to county custody. Gillpatrick knew of the threat, and so did Governor Stanley.⁵⁷

56. "Blames Everhardy," *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901.

57. James H. Gillpatrick to Governor William Eugene Stanley, January 15, 1901, 27-05-06-06, box 3, folder 13, Stanley Papers. Gillpatrick was supported by the *Times* and the Anthony family during the 1900 election.

What options did Stanley have for ensuring the safety of Fred Alexander? Unlike today, turn-of-the-century Kansas had neither a state police nor a bureau of investigation. Still, state officials had alternatives and could have moved for a change of venue, transferring the suspect to Topeka, Lawrence, or Wichita, as it was inconceivable that Fred Alexander could have received a fair trial anywhere in Leavenworth County. If that was not acceptable to county officials or the governor, the trial could have been held at the state prison, as Alexander was already in state custody. Finally, Stanley could have declared martial law and ordered a battalion or more of the National Guard to ensure the safety of the prisoner and the operations of the district court. Unfortunately, the governor did nothing, either purposefully or because he trusted Everhardy's alleged assurances over Gillpatrick's warnings.

Mobilizing Republican newspapers in support of Stanley was easy. Soon most of the Republican-controlled press supported the governor's argument that "the death penalty must be restored in Kansas and then things of this kind will not happen." Henry Allen, Stanley's private secretary, even wrote an editorial in the *Ottawa Evening Herald* seconding the governor by claiming, "When it is known to a certainty that criminals are to be brought to judgment and pay the penalty, without the intervention of trickery, from defending attorneys, which of itself often amounts to a crime, the impulse toward lynch law will be checked." At a time when sex offenders were seldom rigorously punished, he wrote that not only should capital punishment be administered for murder, but also for rape. The *Times* agreed. Not reported in the *Times* was Allen's clear message to future mobs that only "when lynchers themselves are certain of a punishment befitting the enormity of their crime, lynching will be stopped."⁵⁸

Still, the *Times* and its publisher D. R. Anthony, Sr., sought to blame Democrats and Populists for the lynching of Fred Alexander.⁵⁹ Other Leavenworth citizens went further and contrived the notion that ruffians from Platte City, Missouri, were behind the burning because they believed Missourians could never be trusted

58. "Blames Everhardy," *Leavenworth Times*, January 16, 1901; "Gov. Stanley Indignant," *Ottawa Evening Herald*, January 16, 1901; *Ottawa Evening Herald*, January 18, 1901.

59. Charles W. Boyd, a sheriff from Omaha, Nebraska, took exception to Stanley's appraisal of Everhardy's actions. As he wrote to Stanley, "I am surprised and astonished that you are trying to lay all the blame for this at the door of Sheriff Everhardy of Leavenworth, while it is your duty to look into the [lynching] more carefully than you have done." Charles W. Boyd to William Eugene Stanley, January 16, 1901, 27-05-06-06, box 3, folder 13, Stanley Papers.

to live within the confines of humanity or the law. Edgar W. Howe, the editor of the *Atchison Daily Globe*, was the first to raise the possibility that Alexander was innocent. Although no special friend of African Americans and even known for attacking them in the past, Howe ran a banner headline on January 17, 1901: "Some Blame Everhardy; Others Stanley: No One Seems to Think the Negro Had Anything to Do With It."⁶⁰ The day before, January 16, Howe had done something even more extraordinary: he told the truth about race relations in turn-of-the-century Kansas, writing that "there is no doubt that the white and black races hate each other. Northern people hate blacks more bitterly than do the white people of the south, for the reason that in the north more imprudent, worthless Negroes are found than in the south. In the south, the bad Negroes are forced to behave themselves. These are the facts that must be faced."⁶¹

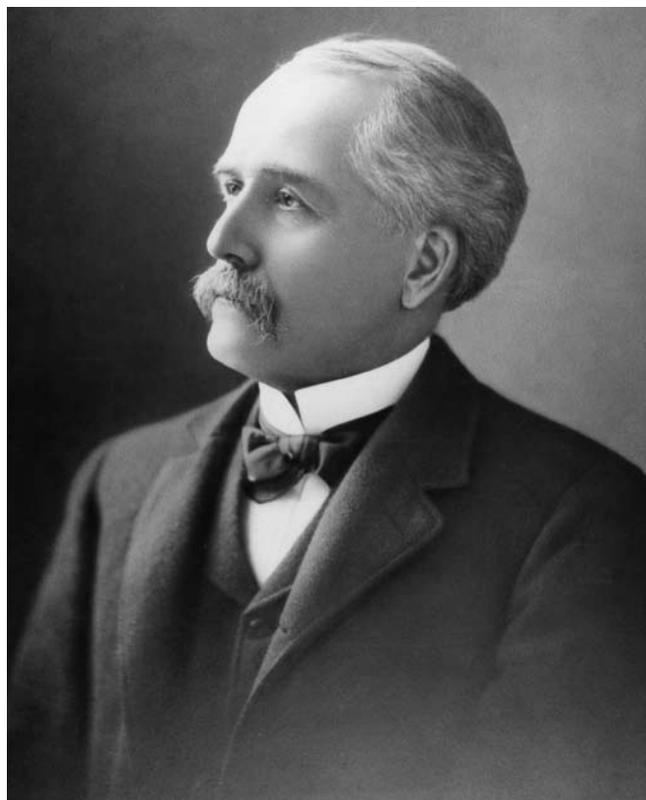
Governor Stanley understood that if he could not convince the public of his sincerity, then he must deceive them. Stanley achieved this by first indicating his intention to bring the perpetrators of the lynching to justice, and then avoiding the issue at all costs. The governor's public statements concerning his indignation about the Alexander case reaped political dividends. A lawyer from Joplin, Missouri, wrote Stanley, "My father was one of John Brown's followers. . . . I am glad Governor that you are determined to bring the perpetrators of the that dastardly crime [the immolation of Alexander] to justice . . . [and] do your best to wipe out that foul blot upon the pages of Kansas history."⁶²

Stanley vacillated on whether to issue a reward for the arrest of those responsible, but after weighing the op-

60. *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 17, 1901. Howe defended Leavenworth for the lynching. His biographer, Calder M. Pickett, noted that Howe respected William Allen White, but when White questioned the cruel burning of Alexander, Howe responded that "Alexander did not permit Pearl Forbes to die easily as possible." But more troubling, Howe often used other papers to support his position, quoting them verbatim to argue against such interlocutors as "a Leavenworth preacher named Newman [who] attacked the people because of the recent lynching." In response Howe cited the *Leavenworth Chronicle*, which noted, "in the community in which Mr. Newman was bred it may be the proper thing to champion a black devil who has outraged the chastity of nine or ten white women, and murdered one, and when he is caught, and his crimes brought home to him, attempt to prevent the punishment being applied, by talking about the law, where there is no law fitting the offense." See Calder M. Pickett, *Ed Howe: Country Town Philosopher* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1968), 158–59, 337; "The Indignant Mr. White," *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 24, 1901; *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 22, 1901.

61. Howe quoted in "Kansas Crime Reviewed," *Plaindealer*, January 25, 1901.

62. W. Jones to William Eugene Stanley, January 17, 1901, 27-05-06-06, box 3, folder 13, Stanley Papers.



William E. Stanley, a Republican originally from Ohio, served as Kansas governor from 1899 until 1903. On January 13, 1901, officials at the state penitentiary at Lansing informed the governor of the escalating situation outside their gates. Although Stanley notified the National Guard in Lawrence and Topeka to stand ready for mobilization, he did not immediately send troops. After the lynching, the governor placed blame squarely on Everhardy, claiming that the sheriff assured him the crisis was under control.

tions, he declined. He claimed that "it would be absolutely no use to issue the offer," because Leavenworth would never convict the perpetrators if they were apprehended. But the coroner's verdict on January 17 mobilized African Americans, who knew that Fred Alexander did not die at the hands of "parties unknown." W. B. Townsend played a critical role in exerting pressure on officials to reverse the governor's response. Stanley was in a bind; on the one hand, he was pressured by African Americans throughout Kansas for justice; on the other, influential officials sought to protect the perpetrators. The governor took the course of least resistance and signed a reward proclamation on February 26, more than a month after the Leavenworth tragedy. Stanley offered:

A reward of FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS for the apprehension and arrest within ninety days from this date, and final conviction, of

the unknown party or parties composing the mob, who on about 15th day of January 1901, in Leavenworth County, Kansas, forcibly seized one *George Alexander* from the officers of said County and burned him at the stake, said reward to be paid upon such conviction.

The proclamation appeared in most African American papers, including the erroneous listing of George Alexander as the victim.⁶³

The vigilante committee and its participants had nothing to fear. Calls for their prosecution went nowhere. W. B. Townsend initially accepted Stanley's position and took the governor at his word.⁶⁴ Townsend was willing to name names of some of those involved, such as Harry W. Koohler, the county coroner, and those in the police department who actively participated in the crime. At first he avoided identifying the marquee figures such as the mayor and D. R. Anthony, Jr., who either directly or indirectly orchestrated the lynching, but in a fit of righteous anger Townsend "made an ill-advised statement while excitement ran high," according to E. W. Howe of the *Daily Globe* and perhaps implicated those men.⁶⁵ But Howe also noted that Townsend's comments may have been an invention spread by his enemies. Townsend's efforts to seek justice were a clear threat to those who participated in the lynching, even if they did not plan the operation. To be safe from the public's wrath, Townsend and his wife left Leavenworth shortly after the burning. They fled to Atchison on January 24, and later to Topeka.⁶⁶

While the Townsends were away, three men, one local and two out-of-towners, went to his home between 1:00 and 2:00 a.m. on the morning of February 18, and set his house ablaze, extensively damaging his home and personal possessions. Clearly this was a warning for Townsend to cease his persistent efforts to bring the "parties unknown" to justice. The *American Citizen*,

a black newspaper in Kansas City, informed readers that Townsend left Leavenworth "because he had the manhood to speak out against the burning of one of his race."⁶⁷ Remarkably absent in the *Times* were editorials in support of Townsend's position or even any mention of either the burning of Townsend's home or the arrest and court appearance of the perpetrators of that crime. This was especially surprising given that Townsend was not only a dedicated Republican but a loyal Anthony ally, defending him in court in 1899 for assault. But when political advantage could be made, Anthony struck, particularly when he criticized Officer Michael McDonald for assaulting Townsend on his return to Leavenworth on May 30. Anthony believed McDonald was "unfit to be a police officer and he should be made to pay the penalty for his crime."⁶⁸ Yet no effort was made by the *Times* or other Leavenworth papers to link McDonald or other ringleaders to the murder of Fred Alexander. In 1901 Townsend left Leavenworth for Pueblo, Colorado, where he had a more illustrious career than he ever attained in Kansas. Yet, as one scholar stressed, "Townsend remained, nonetheless unbowed" in his efforts for racial justice despite the personal costs he paid for his courage.⁶⁹

As the dust settled following the Alexander lynching, Leavenworth was under constant barrage from all quarters for its barbarism. In response, the *Leavenworth Chronicle* articulated a justification for the lynching, which served as the unofficial rationale for what happened:

To men who know not what it is to feel that their women are at any moment subject to assault if they chance to be alone; who, when wife or daughter is half an hour late in returning home, at once conjure up the possibility of a negro rape fiend; whose neighbor's daughter has been raped and suffers in silence rather than endure

63. "Echoes From the Pyre," *Leavenworth Times*, January 17, 1901, italics added; Reward for the Murder of George Alexander, 27-05-07-04, box 8, folder 2: Crime and Criminals, Proclamation of Reward 1901, Stanley Papers, italics added. George Alexander was not a relative, but was a black coal miner working in the Riverside Mines. One can only speculate as to the reason for the rather serious mistake in the proclamation—whether it was simply a clerical error or callous indifference on the part of the governor and/or his staff. Following the lynching, the Afro-American Council representing black civic leaders statewide met repeatedly with Stanley in order to bring those responsible for the lynching of Fred Alexander to justice.

64. "Echoes From the Pyre," *Leavenworth Times*, January 17, 1901.

65. "By Parties Unknown," *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 17, 1901.

66. *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 24, 1901.

67. One of the perpetrators was forty-five-year-old James Smith, a farmer from Delaware Township, located near Lansing. Another was twenty-one-year-old P. W. Bradley, who lived on his father's farm in Brown County, near Robinson City. The third was a local, who listed his name as "John Doe." Docket of Arrests, City of Leavenworth, 1898–1903, docket numbers 52, 53, and 54 for February 18, 1901; *American Citizen*, March 1, 1901; "Negroes Organize," *Plaindealer*, March 1, 1901.

68. "Bolend [sic] Townsend Assaulted by M'Donald," *Leavenworth Times*, May 31, 1901; "A Brutal Act," *Leavenworth Times*, June 1, 1901.

69. Campney, "W. B. Townsend," 272–73. The black community believed that McDonald and Koohler played central roles in the lynching.

the shame of exposure; whose city is haunted by a lust-governed devil who banks upon the fact that respectable white women would rather remain silent than cause him to be prosecuted; to men who know not these things, as actual vital facts of their everyday life, it is easy enough to say Alexander should not have been burned. But to men who feel these things to be daily actualities, the punishment that was meted out on Lawrence avenue to this moral leper, seems just and right.⁷⁰

Leavenworth's other papers, and those in neighboring communities, responded in a similar fashion. Throughout their coverage of Pearl Forbes's murder, Eva Roth's rape, and Fred Alexander's lynching, the newspapers embellished the evidence to such an extent that they played on what James McPherson called those "darker passions of hatred and vengeance."⁷¹ This reporting, colored by a number of political and racial motivations, culminated in the public burning on a Leavenworth street corner on January 15, 1901.

Leavenworth, of course, was not the only city to see such violence. Lynchings were occurring at a staggering rate across the United States at the turn of the century. When the Wichita *Searchlight* reported the immolation of Fred Alexander, it noted that another lynching was foiled in Wichita on January 14, 1901, when a white mob attempted to lynch William Snelly, a black man, for shooting a local white. When news of the planned lynching reached black residents, "every colored man who could be found was informed by a committee [who spread the news] and by eight o'clock [a force of] colored men, armed with shotguns, pistols, knives, clubs, and every other imaginable instrument of destruction was formed." Guards were posted and "if an attempt at lynching was made . . . there would be 'a hot time in the old town that night.'"⁷² The lesson was obvious to the *Searchlight*: "The Negro's friend has dwindled to a Smith & Wesson pistol, a Repeating Rifle, 50 rounds of ammunition for each, a strong nerve, a lesson in good marksmanship. . . . Any Negro without this friend is a fool."⁷³

The *Plaindealer* was even more vociferous, asking, "are they cowards?" The paper challenged the manliness of black people in Leavenworth, wondering if they "won't call a meeting denouncing the mob and take proper steps to protect their fellow townsman, W. B. Townsend, from the threats of dire vengeance from that Neely and Everhardy, democratic hoodlum gang. . . . If the Negroes of Kansas let this brutal affray go unnoticed, Kansas will be like Georgia and Texas in a few years." It was up to blacks throughout the state to stand up and "do their duty," not like "those Negroes in Leavenworth who are afraid of [losing] their jobs, [and are] keep[ing] their mouths shut and be[coming] a lick spittle for those demons."⁷⁴ The answer was obvious. In addition to meetings, resolutions, and peaceful endeavors to enforce the law, black men must be willing to protect their racial brothers by force if need be, disregarding the dangers that could ensue if those efforts failed.

Initially, the state legislature made no effort to outlaw lynching after the Alexander murder. But with the gruesome hanging a year later in Pittsburg of Mont Godley, an African American, state officials feared that Kansas was returning to a pattern of racial violence not seen since the 1880s and 1890s. Finally they were ready to act. The Kansas legislature criminalized vigilante justice in 1903. The statute defined both lynching and aiding and abetting, and set the punishment from five years to life if the victim was murdered. The law even criminalized anyone who knew about a lynching plan, making them accessories. If found guilty of aiding and abetting, they could be imprisoned for no less than two and no more than twenty-one years. Likewise, the new law removed from office any sheriff or deputy who failed to protect a prisoner in their custody. The law authorized the governor to conduct a hearing to determine the sheriff's fitness to remain in office and could reinstate the sheriff if the evidence warranted.⁷⁵

For the next fourteen years, Kansans were spared the horrors of extralegal violence, and it seemed the antilynching statute was an effective deterrent. On September 21, 1916, however, a mob hanged Bert Dudley for murder in Olathe. In reaction, Governor Arthur Capper and Attorney General S. M. Brewster removed

70. "The Chronicle Attitude," *Leavenworth Chronicle*, January 24, 1901. Leavenworth was attacked by the editorials in nearly all sections of the country, except for the South.

71. James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 1.

72. "Mob Foiled," *Searchlight*, January 19, 1901.

73. *Ibid.*

74. "Are They Cowards," *Plaindealer*, February 1, 1901.

75. *Kansas Laws* (1903), ch. 221; see also *Kansas Revised Statutes* (1923), 391-92; for the Godley lynching, which took place in the early morning hours of Christmas 1902 and was occasioned by the shooting of a police officer before midnight on Christmas Eve, see Yost, "Lynchings in Kansas," 219; "Murder and Lynching," *Pittsburg Daily Headlight*, December 26, 1902.



With the end of World War I, a new wave of racially inspired violence rocked the United States. Race riots broke out and lynchings escalated. Between 1918 and 1923, there were five lynchings in Missouri and one in Kansas. Although this was the last lynching of an African American in the state, race relations in Kansas were still strained. The Ku Klux Klan infiltrated Leavenworth in the 1920s, as it did many Kansas communities. Pictured are members of the KKK parading down a Leavenworth street in 1924. The next year the state Supreme Court upheld Kansas's legal right to oust the group, a decision ultimately accepted by the U.S. Supreme Court. Photograph courtesy of the Leavenworth County Historical Society.

the sheriff, but following a subsequent hearing, Capper restored the official, pending the arrest of the perpetrators. Upon reflection, Brewster wrote Capper and confided, "I doubt very much if anything we could do now would result in the apprehension of the men guilty of the offense." Even though they realized that the enforcement of the lynching statue was next to impossible, Brewster told Capper, "It might do some good if you would write to the sheriff and call his attention to the promises which he made to you prior to his reinstatement."⁷⁶

With the end of World War I, a new wave of racially inspired violence rocked the United States. Race riots broke out in twenty-six American cities, including Washington and Chicago, and lynchings escalated. Between 1918 and 1923, there were five lynchings in

76. S. M. Brewster to Arthur Capper, February 20, 1917, Governor's Office, Correspondence Files Governor Arthur Capper, General Correspondence Material File, 1917-1918, No. 49-120, 27-08-02-07, box 12, folder General Correspondence—Numerical File 88-91, Library and Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka.

Missouri and one in Kansas. On April 19, 1920, a mob lynched Albert Evans for rape in Mulberry; he was the last African American lynched in Kansas. As the efforts by blacks to stop the lynchings of Alexander in Leavenworth and Snelly in Wichita demonstrate, increasingly blacks no longer sat idly by and watched members of their race become victims of vigilante justice. Unfortunately, the Evans lynching was spontaneous and proved impossible for the African American community to mobilize against.

Many blacks believed white officials would never protect black defendants facing angry white mobs. The test came on Thursday, December 16, 1920, when a white grocer, R. R. Wharton, was killed during a robbery in Independence, Kansas. The police arrested Noble Green, a thirty-seven-year-old father of four. Soon a mob appeared before the jail and the deputy sheriff feared violence. This time, African Americans armed themselves to protect Green. Almost simultaneously, an armed white mob materialized. No one knows who fired the first shot, but as the National Guard reported, "a fusillade . . . [was] exchanged between whites and blacks,

resulting in the death of one Negro, two whites, and the serious wounding of three other whites." To witnesses it appeared that "a race war was on" in Independence. Only the timely arrival of the National Guard ended the threats of Noble Green's lynching and a continued race riot.⁷⁷ After these events in Independence, no further attempts were made to lynch an African American in Kansas.

Similar efforts by armed black men to defend a black suspect against lynching occurred not long after in the black community of Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma. On May 30, 1921, nineteen-year-old Dick Rowland, a shoeshine boy, entered the Drexel Building in downtown Tulsa to use the lavatory. Rowland took the building's elevator, operated by a young white woman, seventeen-year-old orphan Sarah Page. As one scholar noted, we will never know what happened, but when Rowland ran from the elevator, followed by Page screaming, authorities assumed the worst. According to most accounts of the riot that followed, Rowland had simply stepped on Page's foot. Initially, Rowland was not arrested, but on the following day he was placed in custody. As often happened in lynchings, the local newspaper, the *Tulsa Tribune*, which embellished the incident and inflamed the white public at a time when the Ku Klux Klan was active in Oklahoma, exaggerated the situation.⁷⁸

Forty-five minutes after the *Tribune* hit the streets someone called the police and reported that there was talk of lynching Rowland. Quickly a mob of approximately fifteen hundred to two thousand whites arrived at the jail, indicating that a lynching was in the offing. Unlike Leavenworth in 1901, but very similar to the events in Independence in 1920, five hundred armed blacks arrived on the scene to protect Rowland. The *New York Times* considered the armed men "a negro army." The sheriff, along with one of three black officers on the

Tulsa police force, Barney Cleaver, tried to convince the black contingent to return home. But no attempt was made to disperse the white mob that not only continued to grow, but also started to ransack local hardware stores for weapons and ammunition.⁷⁹ The governor mobilized the Oklahoma National Guard, but the governor's order came too late. Tulsa experienced a full-blown race war, something that the Kansas National Guard had feared in Independence. Whites attacked blacks at will, in some cases burning black homes while the residents remained inside. Thirty to thirty-five blocks of Tulsa, the so-called "Black Wall Street," were left smoldering and nearly six thousand blacks were held in preventive detention. The death toll reported by the *New York Times* numbered nine whites and sixty-eight blacks by June 1, but recent estimates by leading historians, including John Hope Franklin and Scott Ellsworth, put the death toll at three hundred.⁸⁰

The riots in the 1920s in Independence and Tulsa suggest that it is unclear whether or not the lynching of Fred Alexander in Leavenworth on January 15, 1901, could have been stopped. It is possible that had blacks in Leavenworth maintained their resistance after arming themselves to protect Alexander, a race war would have resulted. What is clear is that by failing to place Leavenworth under martial law before Alexander's lynching, Governor William Stanley started a chain of events that emboldened vigilantes and forced African Americans to put their faith, not in the judicial process, but in armed self-protection. Only later, once it became commonplace for African Americans to collectively protect black suspects and civil authorities began to deploy the National Guard to stop racial conflicts, did Kansas finally put an end to vigilante justice targeting blacks. [KH]

79. *Ibid.*, 47–52.

80. *Ibid.*, 66; "85 Whites and Negroes Die in Tulsa Riots as 3,000 Armed Men Battle in the Streets," *New York Times*, June 2, 1921. Ellsworth and others cite the Red Cross figures at three hundred; see Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*, 69; "Panel Seeks Clearer View of 1921 Tulsa Race Riot," *New York Times*, February 21, 1999; John Hope Franklin and Scott Ellsworth, "History Knows No Fences: An Overview," in *The Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 ([Oklahoma City, Okla.]: The Commission, [2001]), 23. For additional information on the Tulsa race riot see James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: America's Worst Race Riot and Its Legacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002); Alfred L. Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Race Riot: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University, 2002); Tim Madigan, *The Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2001).

77. Yost, "Lynchings in Kansas," 219; Adjutant General State of Kansas, *Twenty-Third Biennial Report 1921–1922* (Topeka: Kansas State Printer, 1923), 28.

78. Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1992), 46–47.