

Thanksgiving 1866: Wounds of war unhealed in Kentucky

By Andrew Wolfson

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) - Louisville's streets were quiet on Thanksgiving Day 150 years ago.

Few people were out, in part because the mud on Nov. 29, 1866, was so deep, and the city's street crossings already were "the worst in the country," wrote the Daily Courier.

It was the fourth Thanksgiving since President Abraham Lincoln had proclaimed Nov. 22 in November a national holiday, and business was "almost entirely suspended" in Louisville, then the nation's 12th-largest city.

"The consumption of turkeys, oysters and mince and pumpkin pie was enormous," the paper reported, "and the dealers in those articles reaped quite a harvest."

After their enormous meals, some residents retired to the Academy of Music to take in Professor William Tanner with his performing dogs and monkeys and Senorita Rosita - danseuse, pantomimist and tight-rope walker.

For many, there was much to celebrate. As President Andrew Johnson, the former Tennessee tailor, observed in his Thanksgiving proclamation, the year had been "crowned with many peculiar blessings." The Civil War "so recently closed among us has not been anywhere reopened," he said, while "intrusive pestilence has been benignly mitigated" and "domestic tranquility had improved."

But the wounds of war had hardly healed, especially for Kentucky's 225,483 freed slaves and the 10,684 blacks who had begun the decade already free.

In Louisville, where troops returned from the South to be mustered out, soldiers and civilians clashed on a daily basis and what was known as the "war after the war" tore through the state.

The federal Freedmen's Bureau, charged with aiding and protecting blacks, reported hundreds of "outrages" against them, including beatings, rape and murder. The Civil Rights Act of 1866, passed six months earlier over Johnson's veto, gave blacks the right to testify against whites, but it was ignored in state courts across Kentucky, and as a result, white vigilantes went unpunished.

Government soldiers prevented mass violence in Louisville, but earlier in the year, 65 miles northeast of the city, in the Gallatin Race Riot, a band of 500 whites, including so-called Negro "regulators" and members of the newly formed Ku Klux Klan, whipped blacks, stole their property and forced hundreds of them to flee across the Ohio River.

In Shelby County, where freed black men were forced to return to their masters for work to survive - and banned from bars, coffee houses and public buildings - one former slave wrote a plea to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton demanding their "wrights."

"If you call this Freedom," he asked, "what do you call Slavery? Who can live this way?"

In her diary, a young Kentucky girl named Lizzie Hardin, who had just returned to the state after two years in Georgia, described "a hatred, bitter, unrelenting" between Southerners and Union people that "promises to be eternal."

Whites loyal to the party of Lincoln found their lives at risk. In Menifee County, the Rev. Louis Hughes, "an aged and highly respected citizen" who had dared cast a vote for the Republican Party on Election Day a few weeks earlier, was beaten with hickory switches for it "till life seemed extinct," then had his skull fractured with a handspike to ensure his demise.

Times were harder than today, of course, for both whites and blacks, rich and poor. The average life expectancy was 45 and "old age" was defined as anything over 50. People didn't live long enough to get heart disease or cancer; the leading causes of death were tuberculosis, dysentery and diarrhea, typhoid fever and pneumonia.

While deadly cholera, which could kill in hours, had largely bypassed Louisville, the Brumback family wasn't so lucky. Mother and child died of the contagion in the weeks before Thanksgiving, and the patriarch sued the city for \$25,000, alleging they contracted the disease because the city had failed to remove standing water at 10th and Green streets in which the disease had germinated.

W.G. Smith had more to be thankful for. He was scheduled to be hanged the day after Thanksgiving for murder, the newspaper reported, but was "respite" for two weeks to allow the governor to consider commuting his sentence.

For some, like the wife of Confederate Army Capt. A.J.M. Brown, the holiday offered a new start. On Thanksgiving eve, she sued him for divorce, charging that while he'd been stationed in West Virginia as a member of the 2nd Kentucky infantry, a young woman named Lizzie slept in his tent for a month and was sometimes "called a cook but did not for any cooking."

The public salivated over crimes of dishonor.

Under the headline, "A Man Deserts his Wife and Goes off with a Notorious Courtesan," the Daily Courier (which would merge with the Daily Journal two years later to become The Courier-Journal) reported how Francis A. McHarry, "a well-known sporting character," had beaten and abused his wife Sarah and neglected her and her children for the past year, spending most of his time with a "notorious prostitute who goes by the name Sallie Brown." Upon his arrest in Jeffersonville for adultery, he drew a revolver on his wife's attorney, who drew his own pistol.

Women's rights were a distant thought - literally. The paper's only report on them chronicled a meeting in Albany, N.Y., where suffragists, declaring their status "lower than the negro," collected 10,000 signatures demanding the right to vote.

Louisville did offer a new "restaurant for ladies" at 159 S. Fourth St., which was said to be "constantly supplied with all the delicacies of the season."

During an era with fewer forms of entertainment, the newspapers treated crime as an amusement.

The daily report from Police Court began each day with a poem; the verse on Thanksgiving began: "The sights in this young city are strange and queer / The Dutchman drinks his lager and the Englishman his beer."

The most common offenses seemed to be "hog thievery" and public intoxication - each drunk was individually described, including a "rural friend from the sweet little village of Bardstown" who had gotten "tighter'n a brick" and was fined \$3 for it. A graphic story about the former reported how thieves "drive the hogs till they get near town, then they slaughter them on the highway."

Louisville was still a young city; the first white resident born there, Thomas Joyce, had died earlier in the year, at age 77. But it already was thoroughly corrupt: Sworn in a year earlier as Louisville's 15th mayor, Philip Tomppert was impeached because he refused to sign a law approving a streetcar along Market Street after it was revealed that one of the council members had taken a \$5,000 bribe to support it. The council removed him for "neglect of duty."

Still, the Daily Courier found plenty to celebrate on Thanksgiving. It noted that fleas were gone for season, "retired from public life" by recent cold weather, although some "pests" remained, it pointed out, including "mothers who force disinterested persons to notice their darling children" and "ladies who crowd you out of your seats to make room for their poodles."

It was also a good day for a reporter assigned to write about Thanksgiving bill of fare at local restaurants. Having "but one stomach," he said, he picked a single establishment where he gorged himself with oyster soup; turkey stuffed with oysters; roast pig stuffed with sweet potatoes and chestnuts; roast beef; roast venison; prairie chicken; pigs' feet and jelly; sauerkraut and potatoes a la Bismarck; pumpkin, apple and cranberry pie; and egg nog.

"It would suit us to have thanksgiving come every day upon these terms," wrote the anonymous scribe.

Yet life was no laughing matter, especially in the South, on that day.

While the North had prospered during the war - and in "some consequence because of it" - wrote The New York Times, the people of the South are "impoverished - some on the verge of starvation. Their crops have failed. They are dispirited and burdened with a load of doubt and fears."

In Louisville, a concert series was announced for the benefit of the "suffering people of the southern states."

Black Kentuckians found their newfound freedoms were snatched before they had a chance to exercise them. Gov. Thomas Bramlette, a Louisville lawyer in the third year of his term, opposed ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendments, which gave blacks citizenship and the right to vote.

The governor pardoned ex-Confederate soldiers and sympathizers, who had been charged with treason, and they swept into public offices, law firms, insurance companies and other businesses, taking control of Louisville - and leading to the jibe that the city entered the Confederacy after the war.

Meeting in Louisville, the Democratic Party of Kentucky adopted a platform opposing equality for blacks and deeming it both "inexpedient and unwise to permit them to exercise the right of either a jurymen or voter."

As they did during the war, some of Louisville's most clever entrepreneurs - like attorney R.T. Durrett - made money by working both sides. In an advertisement on Thanksgiving Day, he offered to collect on claims of "loyal Kentuckians" whose slaves had been conscripted into the Union army - as well as bounties due "negroes themselves" for their service in the Union army.

With blacks barred from testifying against whites in state courts, atrocities against them were tried in federal court. On Thanksgiving eve, several white defendants previously convicted of "maltreating" blacks based in part on "negro testimony," moved for a new trial on the grounds that allowing such testimony violated their constitutional rights.

Only nine defendants were ever convicted in federal court - and two were pardoned. The so-called black testimony rule allowed freedmen and women to be robbed, beaten, murdered and raped with impunity.

Clinton Fisk, a former brigadier general in the Union army who was now a senior officer in the Freedmen's Bureau, said in no Southern state he had visited did "such a fiendish spirit prevail."

Of the white marauders, he said, "There are some of the meanest, unsubjected and rascally rebellious revolutionists in Kentucky that curse the country's soil."

Epilogue

- Impeached for standing up to corruption, Mayor Tomppert won redemption when Kentucky's high court reinstated him to office in 1867. He died six years later, of Typhoid fever, and is buried in Eastern Cemetery.

- Gov. Bramlette, who opposed federal intervention in Kentucky after the Civil War, resumed his legal practice in Louisville after his term until his death in 1875. He is buried in Cave Hill Cemetery.

- Bramlette supported passage of the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery, saying it was "irrevocably doomed," but the Kentucky General Assembly didn't ratify it until 1976 - when it became the second to last state to do so, ahead of only Mississippi.

- General Fisk later endowed the historically black university in Nashville that bears his name with a \$30,000 gift, and he helped establish the first free public schools in the South for white and African-American children.

- The fate of W.G. Smith, the recipient of the Thanksgiving reprieve, is lost to history, as is the outcome of the adultery charge against Francis McHarry, who is unrelated to the legendarily foul-tempered ferry captain of the same name, who is buried in a vault on the Ohio River, supposedly so he could curse passing riverboats.

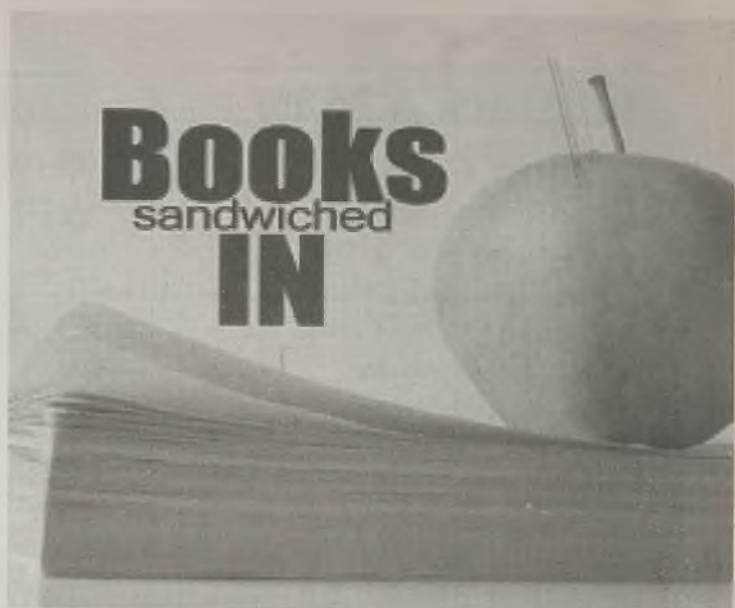
- The struggle for the right of freed blacks to testify is well-documented, however. On New Year's Day 1867, thousands of freedmen gathered in Louisville to demand the right to vote and appear as witnesses. "We ask no man for pity," said one of the speakers, Walter F. Butler. "We only ask you to take your hand off the black man's head and let him grow to manhood."

In 1869, seven of the most esteemed lawyers and judges in the state petitioned the General Assembly to wipe out the Negro testimony ban, but the bill was defeated. Only after federal prosecutors charged Louisville Municipal Court Judge J. Hop Price - and eventually three others judges - with felonies for failing to allow black testimony did the tide start to change.

In 1871, the Courier-Journal called for lifting the ban - not to benefit blacks but to keep white defendants and their lawyers from being "jerked from one end of Kentucky to another" to appear for prosecution in federal court.

All doubts that a new law of evidence would be adopted were swept away when three young members of the most powerful and prestigious white families in Central Kentucky were indicted on a charge of gang lynching a white man. On Jan. 19, 1872, state lawmakers finally enacted a new law of evidence. The word of blacks finally mattered. They could now stand on equal footing with whites as witnesses in Kentucky courtrooms.

» As for Thanksgiving itself, it continued to be celebrated on the in November for 73 more years - until 1939, when President Franklin Roosevelt decided to move it up a week, to give merchants more time to sell goods before Christmas and propel the nation out of the Great Depression. Republicans called it an affront to Lincoln's memory, and about half the states refused to go along, mocking the new date as "Franksgiving." Two years later, though, Congress made it official, and the fourth Thursday of November became Thanksgiving's official home. Even then, on years with five Thursdays in the month, some states refused to go along, including Texas, until 1956.



Books Sandwiched In Meets Dec. 7

Books Sandwiched In will meet to discuss Crossing to Safety by Wallace Stegner at 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, Dec. 7, in Meeting Room C at the Chapel Hill Public Library.

Crossing to Safety has been called one of the greatest novels of the 20th century. It traces the lives, loves, and aspirations of two couples who move between Vermont and Wisconsin. It is a meditation on the alchemy of friendship and marriage. The characters are an unlikely quartet composed of a prolific novelist, his polio-stricken wife; an heir, and his control freak wife. The scenes include their meeting at a faculty dinner party, a boating party, a year in Florence Italy, and the last scene as one of the wives dies of cancer. It has been called a magnificently crafted book, one of quiet majesty, deep compassion, and powerful insight.

Books Sandwiched In, the book club of The Friends of the Chapel Hill Public Library, meets on the first Wednesday of each month except January and July at 11:30 a.m. in meeting room C at the Library. Everyone is welcome to join the group which is free and open to the public. Participants are encouraged to bring a lunch and share their thoughts on the current reading selection. Copies of the books are available on a first-come first-served basis at the circulation desk.

Books Sandwiched In selections for the year are chosen by the members and can be found on the Friends' web site at www.friend-schpl.org.

For additional information, please contact: Martha Brunstein at marthabee4@yahoo.com or 919-402-8964.

Church News

White Rock Baptist

Women of White Rock Baptist Church and the church's Titus Women ministry will portray a variety of women of the Bible along with the life lessons they teach today's women on Saturday, December 3, from 9:00 - 11:30 am. This signature event is designed to inspire,

enlighten, and empower today's women as they see themselves in the stories and learn from them, making the lives of Biblical women useful and relevant for today. White Rock Baptist Church is located at 3400 Fayetteville Street in Durham. To attend, please contact the church office at 919 688-8136 so that we may adequately plan our breakfast menu. The program is open to the community.

The Prison Ministry and Global Missions of White Rock Baptist Church, 3400 Fayetteville Street in Durham, will host a session on "Families Affected by Incarceration" on December 3 from noon to 2 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall at the church. The public is invited.

Through The Fire

(Continued From Page 4)

through the fire. I will never leave you nor forsake you! (John 14:8). Join our live streaming and Video On Demand. Just click on this link: <http://new.livestream.com/mynjbc>

AND LIKE US!

Deaths

(Continued On Page 6)



MRS. WILLIE JUANITA MANGUM NORWOOD

Final rites for Mrs. Willie Juanita Mangum Norwood were held at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church. Rev. Jerome Washington officiated. Interment was in Beechwood Cemetery.

She was born July 25, 1926 in Mangum Township, Bahama, a daughter of the late McKinley and Mrs. Hattie N. Parker Mangum. She died Nov. 14.

She attended Durham and Wake County Public Schools. She earned a B.S. Degree in Voc. Home Economics and General Science from Shaw University in 1954. She received her M.A. Degree in Science from Morgan State University.

She taught at Apex C consolidated High School, George Washington Carver High school, Lexington Park, Md and other Middle schools in Maryland and Durham.

She was a honor award as Elementary Teacher of American in 1974.

She was a member of Mt. Vernon Baptist Church. She was active in Sunday School, Missionary Circle, Adult Ushers and Comforting Committee and president of the kingdom Seekers Bible Class.

She was a member of LaPetite Garden Club, Alpha Theta Sorority, Inc, NAACP, Home Economics Education Association, Future Homemakers of America, Alumni of Shaw University and Ruth Missionary Ministry and Retired Teachers Association.

Surviving are a sister, Ms. Mary Burnett; three brothers, Warren Mangum, Virginia Beach, Va, James Mangum, Pennsauken, N.J. and Leon Mangum, Willingboro, N.J.

Arrangements by Burtney Funeral Service.

Register Now to Vote in 2018