

Transcript of article: *Sentinel* (Montgomery County, Maryland) January 12, 1880

Attempted Rape and Lynch Law

The crime of outrage was summarily avenged at Poolesville, this county on Saturday night by lynching of a negro a few hours after he had attempted his fiendish assault upon the person of a young girl. The community has been moved to excitement beyond all precedent, and, it must be confessed, the greater share of residents in that locality are inclined to condone the work of the lynchers, for the negro's crime was of such an outrageous character that there is a general feeling of relief at his death.

The Negro and His Childish Victim

The negro upon whom this summary vengeance was visited was named George Peck and a more villainous young scoundrel never lived in the neighborhood. He was black as jet, with a particularly brutal cast of countenance. Though but twenty-two years of age, he had become notorious for his conduct, and had several times been in jail at Rockville. When a mere lad he attempted a similar crime upon the person of a little child (sic), and at that time narrowly escaped lynching. He lived at Beallsville, about two miles from Poolesville, and for several months past has been in the employ of Mr. Lemuel L. Beall, the proprietor of the store at that place. He was a strong and somewhat burly fellow, weighing over 160 pounds.

Details of the Outrage

On Saturday morning last, Ada, who is a strong and well-built girl, though young in years, went out to the barn of Mr. Reeves to milk the cows. There she saw Peck, but paid no particular attention to him, he was in the habit of being about the premises, doing odd jobs when he saw fit. She sat down to her work, began her milking, and while she was thus engaged Peck came out from behind the straw rick, brushed by her and passed into the stable. She thought nothing of the occurrence, and having finished milking one cow, proceeded to another and resumed her work. Scarcely had she begun when Peck quietly stole up behind her, and before she was aware of this immediate presence, grabbed her by the throat to prevent her screaming threw one arm around her waist, lifted her from her feet and carried her by main force behind the straw rick.

There he had made a hole in the straw and laid her in it. In spite of his efforts to compel her silence by gagging her with his hand and threatening her life if she dare to scream aloud, she was able and had the boldness to give one cry for help. Fortunately this cry was heard, and while the brute was on the point of effecting his purpose upon the person of the helpless girl, a Baptist clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Amy, who happened to be passing at the time and heard her scream, came to her rescue. He was just in time to save her from injury. As soon as the negro saw Rev. Mr. Amy he darted away from the rick into the stable where he stood quietly and stubbornly, refusing to answer any questions, and apparently as unconcerned as if nothing had happened. The girl told the whole story of her wrongs to the clergyman, who happened to have a revolver on his person, and who, when he heard the details of the outrage, could hardly refrain from shooting the negro dead on the spot. Rev. Mr. Amy kindly and carefully lifted the trembling and affrighted (sic) girl in his arms and carried her into the house, where she was kindly cared for. It was found that she was very slightly hurt, as the timely arrival of the clergyman and prevented the negro from accomplishing his brutal purpose.

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Having left the girl in the house, Rev. Mr. Amy hastened to the store of Mr. Beall, where Peck was employed and reported the occurrence. A messenger was hurried off to Poolesville for an officer, while the clergyman and Mr. Beall went back to the barn to keep watch on the negro.

They found that Peck had remained in the stable, and apparently had no intention of making any attempt to escape. At 10 o'clock, Miles, of Poolesville, came in sight, Peck darted from the stable and fled like a deer across a field into a stretch of pine woods. By this time the news of the outrage had spread from mouth to mouth, had quite a crowd of excited men had collected, and with the Poolesville officer, immediately gave chase. Peck was surrounded and for fear that he would make another attempt to escape was securely handcuffed and chained. The first question asked him was whether he intended to outrage the girl, to which he replied that such had certainly been his intention, and he would have accomplished his purpose had it not been for the interference of Rev. Mr. Amy. The confession on his part, which was given with apparent non-chalance and unconcern, excited ominous threats from some of those in the crowd and undoubtedly sealed his doom.

Death Penalty

Officer Miles reached Poolesville with his prisoner about 5 P.M. placing Peck in Odd Fellow's Hall, where he intended to keep him until he could bring him to jail. It very soon became apparent that trouble was brewing. A crowd began to collect about the hall, growing larger each moment, and threats of lynching were by no means infrequent. The officer stood bravely at the door of the hall and refused admission to any one. For six hours or more the crowd stayed, until about 11 o'clock at night when it began to dwindle away, and soon the officer was left alone with his charge. This offered, the officer thought, a good opportunity for him to take the prisoner to his own house, where he thought there would be less danger of violence. The officer's house is located about half a mile from Poolesville, and on his way he stopped at the store of Mr. William T. Walter, wishing to make a few purchases before going home. -- He took Peck with him to the store and locked the door after him. Scarcely had he done this when the store was surrounded by a mob of nearly a hundred excited men. -- The signal for the attack was a pistol shot fired by one of the crowd. Cried of "Lynch him! Lynch him!" were heard on all sides; and in an instant the store door was burst open, and the mob rushed in demanding that the ravisher be delivered to them. A few of the men wore masks, but most of them made no effort whatever to conceal their identity, and were easily recognized, nearly all of them being residents of Beallsville. Officer Miles made the stoutest resistance in his power, but was soon overpowered and blindfolded. The lynchers had brought a rope with them, and this they tied around Peck's neck and dragged him from the store. In the scuffle the stove in the store was overturned, and there was a narrow escape from fire. Peck made but little attempt at resistance. He was dragged hurriedly across the road, thrown over a rail fence, dragged across an open field to a locust tree just in front of the church, where the rope was swung across a limb and he was hung up with his toes about five feet from the ground. The rope was tied to a fence rail, and all the lynchers waited until they felt assured he was dead, when they hurried off, firing back a few parting shots at the suspended body.—It had turned Sunday morning before the lynchers had finished their task; and no one touched the body until 10 A.M. of that day, when officer Miles went out and cut it

down. It hung in full sight of persons passing along the road on their way to church. It was taken to a stable near at hand, where a jury was summoned and a short inquest was held. No attempt was made to identify the lynchers, and a verdict was rendered that "George Peck came to his death by strangulation at the hands of parties unknown to the jury." The body was then quietly buried, and the excitement consequent upon the occurrence has somewhat subsided at this time.