

Janice,
It is fabulous!! I could not stop reading.
I made a few notes in yellow
I am breathless.
I will write a reaction to your paper tonight.
Such courage you showed!
Marvin

This is What We Know: The Story of the Newberry Six

By Janis Owens

"It may be a good thing to forget and forgive; but it is altogether

too easy a trick to forget and be forgiven."

G. K. Chesterton

Preface

At 2:00 am in the morning on August 17, 1916, three men engaged in a gun battle in a vacant tenant shack just off the Old Gainesville Road, in the pine woods of North Florida, eleven miles west of Gainesville. Two of the men were white: one a seasoned deputy, one a popular young pharmacist, recently married. The black man was a farm laborer, the son of former slaves, who was born within a mile of the shack, where he had lived his entire life.

There are varying accounts of the circumstances that brought the three men to the vacant shack at that time of night, and even more debate on who fired the first shot – the deputy, the pharmacist, or the black man who was hung for the deed. What is indisputable is that the brief flare of gunfire – six shots in the dark, in a tiny room of a vacant tenant shack - sparked an American tragedy of uncommon proportions; shameful in its brutality and doubly shameful in that it has never merited more than a footnote in Florida history. Oaths of silence were taken and kept so securely that even a century later, the most enduring remembrance of the

weekend is an oak grove on the east end of town that is still called, casually and without regret: Lynch Hammock.

The history of that hammock and the names of the nine people who were killed that frantic, bloody weekend have been lost to memory. They were Deputy George Wynne. Jim Dennis. Reverend Josh Baskins. Bert Dennis. Andrew McHenry. Mary Dennis. Stella Young.

The names of other victims might someday be added to the list of the murdered. According to the oral history of Jonesville, a longer count could be made.¹ These are the *known* casualties, whose deaths were documented

¹Maria Dennis and Dick Johnson are also possible victims. According to Frank Dudley, Maria Dennis was not lynched because she had a baby with her. Her name has not been located on further censuses, and her true fate is unclear.

Mary Welch said that a man named Dick Johnson also died that weekend, captured by the mob as he drove home in his buggy. (Claudia Adrien, *Gainesville Sun*, Sep 4, 2005) Myrtle Dudley said that three black men were buried in the banks of the railroad between "here and Gainesville." Those bodies have never been found. (Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard February 25, 1992 Samuel Proctor Oral History Project)

Another victim in Jacksonville is mentioned in the *Ocala Evening Star*, August 19, 1916. That victim was not named, but was possibly part of the arrests made by Ham Dowling near Mayport on August 17.

in newspapers and court records, along with descriptions of their deaths.

Deputy Wynne died in the backseat of a Model-T Ford, while being rushed to a waiting train in Waldo, Florida, in a futile attempt to get him to the hospital in Jacksonville to save his life. Jim Dennis died at 10 am the morning of the 18th, shot in the back with a shotgun by a member of a mob, reportedly a sworn deputy. Josh Baskins was returning home from the market in Newberry that same morning when he was caught by the mob and lynched. Bert Dennis, Andrew McHenry, Mary Dennis and Stella Young all died at the old picnic grounds east of town, when a mob of two hundred of “the finest men in the area”² hung them from the limbs of a single live oak.

They were lynched in a location chosen for its easy public access, in a willful act of vengeance and terror, meant for public consumption. Two guards were posted to guarantee that the bodies weren’t immediately cut down, but left to decompose in the hot August sun, drawing thousands of

² Ron Sachs, Sunday Magazine, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

tourists, who came by car, mule and wagon to view the decaying corpses of a preacher, two brothers, their pregnant sister and her sister-in-law.

Chapter One: Independent of the World

When Florida achieved statehood in 1845, the northern interior of the state was sparsely settled, even by its most recent inhabitants, the Seminole, who were being driven steadily south by the US Army. When the main action of the Seminole War passed further south to Central Florida, congress passed the Armed Occupation and Settlement Act to entice white settlers to pioneer Florida. Anyone who built a home, cultivated five acres and promised to resist the Indians received 160 acres of land.

The offer of free land in East Florida was especially enticing to South Carolina planters who specialized in growing Sea Island Cotton, a particularly luxurious strand that brought a premium price at market, but could only be cultivated in select regions, and like all cotton, depleted the soil. Sea Island Cotton could be cultivated in East Florida, and South Carolinian Phillip B. H. Dudley was one of many young men who left the Carolinas to establish his fortune in newly minted Alachua County.

Dudley, who was born in 1818, had begun his career as an accountant and overseer at the Legare Plantation in St. Johns, South Carolina, and later owned his own plantation, Walnut Hill.³ He worked in cattle when he first arrived in Florida, then as an overseer at a plantation in the area of Fort Clarke, a few miles northwest of the original Arredondo Grant.⁴

Dudley prospered in Florida, buying property in Arredondo and Archer, and holding both elected and public positions, as a trustee for the Alachua County school, and as a road commissioner. On the 1860 federal census, Dudley is living in Archer with his wife, Mary, and three of their children: Virginia, Ben and Joanna. He owns 960 acres and thirty slaves,⁵ making him one of the most prominent planters in sparsely settled Western Alachua County.

While working as road commissioner, Dudley oversaw the work of the slaves who hacked out the highway between Archer and Newnansville (then the county seat.) He bought three hundred choice acres on the

³*Dudley Farm, A History of Florida Farm Life* Ben Pinkard with Sally Morrison

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*

highway, eleven miles west of Gainesville, and built a double pen dog-trot log cabin sufficient to qualify it for homestead.

He was making plans for the construction of a larger plantation house on his property when Florida seceded from the Union in 1861. Dudley was both a slave-holder and an ardent secessionist, and helped establish Company C, 7th Florida Infantry, CSA, where he served as Captain, an honorific that he would carry till his death in 1881.⁶

As the least populated state in the Confederacy (by far), Florida didn't feel the ravages of war that decimated other sections of the South. There were minor skirmishes close by in Gainesville, Olustee and Cedar Key, but Western Alachua County was sparsely settled before, during, and after the war. Phillip Dudley's **regimen** fought with the Army of Tennessee, and saw action from Chickamauga to Nashville, before he mustered out in 1863 because of illness, returning to fight, briefly, before the end of the war, in Florida.

⁶ ibid

In an oral history taken in 1992, Phillip Dudley's granddaughter Myrtle recounted her grandfather's Civil War service: "...Grandpa and them hitched up his slaves, got his own slaves up, and was made captain of his own army team, and he went to the War Between the States. He was in the battle at Jacksonville. They tore it all to pieces. He traced it all the way around the coast clear back to over yonder on the coast over there. Then he turned in and come back to where he was at first. He took camp dysentery, and they brought him home in a wagon that [was] padded."⁷

When the Confederacy was defeated in 1865, Captain Dudley faced the collapse of the southern plantation culture, and the loss of the slave labor that had built his East Florida fortune. With the passage of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, Alachua County slaves, now called Freedmen, could own their own land, attend school, and own their own businesses. They couldn't be denied the right to vote because of their race, and could

⁷ Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

hold public office, which they immediately did, both locally and nationally, rising to the top of the suddenly ascendant Republican Party.

Their new position of power was enforced by federal troops garrisoned in Gainesville, and supported by the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (commonly called the Freedman Bureau), which was passed by Congress to help emancipated slaves establish themselves after the war. Alachua County Freedman “didn’t twiddle their thumbs,” according to African-American historian Patricia Hilliard-Nunn, but “built churches and schools.”⁸ On the West End of the county, Greater Liberty Hill (1869), New Zion Methodist (later named Pleasant Plain) (1868), and Fort Clarke Missionary Baptist Church (1867), were founded, to name but a few. Former slaves from Haile Plantation built Union Academy in Gainesville, and the Liberty Hill School opened in Rutledge in 1869.⁹ By 1883, Carl Webber noted that there are thirty to forty schools for colored children in the county surrounding Gainesville.¹⁰

⁸ Patricia Hilliard-Nunn *Gainesville Sun* August 9, 2014

⁹ Murray Laurie, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 1986

¹⁰ Carl Webber, *Eden of the South*, 1883

The Freedmen's former owners – the same South Carolinians who'd used slave labor to build their highways, fences and houses, who'd fought (and lost) a bloody four-year civil war to defend their right to own slaves, did not easily set aside their grievance. Financially and physically ruined, they set themselves to the task of challenging, and (in time) undermining the political progress of the new Freedmen, with a violence so pervasive that it could be said to be a continuation of the war itself. In his testimony before a subcommittee in 1872, Gainesville Freedman Bureau chief Leonard G. Dennis said eighteen men were murdered in the early years of Reconstruction in Alachua County. He testified of whippings, warnings and the Ku Klux Klan's attempts to silence him, to the point of assassination, till he fled for his life. According to Myrtle Dudley, the racial retaliation in the Jonesville area was swift. "Some of the owners in this community burned everything the niggers had when they were freed."¹¹

The burning of property – barns, houses, even slave cabins – was an old form of terrorism that economically devastated its victims (as Myrtle

¹¹ Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

goes on to report)¹² though the most popular tool that rose to popularity in Reconstruction was that of lynching. Broadly defined as vigilante execution by a mob of more than three people, the practice of lynching had been common in the United States since its inception, with records of whites lynching whites, blacks lynching blacks, and every other racial combination in the melting pot of colonial America.

Lynchings were considered acceptable justice in pioneer regions where courts were seldom in session, and due process not easily accessible, till Reconstruction, when the practice became a favored instrument of racial terror, applied capriciously, with no consideration of due process. The official count of lynching victims in Alachua County is 43, a number that is almost surely underreported, as a close reading of the local newspapers and the oral history of the area concludes. Myrtle Dudley says as much when speaking of the fate of the Dudley family slaves, many of whom left after the war, but not all. "A few of those old nigras stayed here," she

12 *ibid*

recalled. "Some of them went to the towns and around different places.

You do not know how many of them were killed and just buried, either."¹³

The ongoing racial violence across the South lead to the Compromise of 1877 that pulled the last of the occupying Union troops from the South, and restored the old guard to power in the Florida Statehouse. They wasted no time in enacting new legislation called the Black Codes, which was Florida's version of Jim Crow. The Codes applied to any person of color, defined as someone with at least one negro great-grandparent, and restricted these citizen's rights to own property, conduct business, own firearms, along with legally enforced control on how they conducted their personal lives. Black men could be harshly penalized for leaving contracts before labor was complete on many a job., and were subject to vagrancy laws that gave local sheriffs great leniency in arresting them, often for the purpose of providing cheap labor in convict leasing.

13 ibid

Accurately described by historian Douglas Blackmon as “slavery by another name,” convict leasing became the answer to the severe labor shortage in the burgeoning economy of post-Reconstruction Florida. These convicts were rented from the State of Florida by companies who needed large labor supplies to do back-breaking labor in phosphate, highway-building, lumber and naval stores. The West End of Alachua County was dotted by convict/work camps, which were isolated, primitive affairs; hot, brutal confines where underfed, overworked inmates, a majority of them black, were subject to whippings, tortuous confinement in the sweat box, and work under conditions as exploitive and abusive as slavery.¹⁴

Black men were also subject to both public and private community-sanctioned vigilante action. The private lynchings were passed along in oral history, while the public ones were occasionally recorded, with the names of the mob members carefully omitted, such as the lynching of Manny Price and Rob Scruggs in Jonesville in 1903. Price was suspected in

¹⁴ An eyewitness account of life in early convict camps can be found in *The American Siberia, or Fourteen Years' Experience in a Southern Convict Camp*, by J. C. Powell. Powell was the warden of several North Florida camps. He published his memoirs in 1891.

the killing of W. F. Brunson, a white man in the district. Scruggs was suspected of providing the pistol. In the official account reported in local newspapers, a mob of three-hundred men took Price and Scruggs from the custody of “special deputies” who were transferring them from Newberry to Gainesville. They were lynched two miles from town, their bodies were riddled by bullets from the mob.¹⁵

Local newspaper coverage presented their murders as acceptable justice; a “clean lynching” equal to legal execution in the day. This rationale for lynching, especially in rape and murder cases, was based on the ancient law of *lex talionis*, or blood revenge, which was an accepted, even honored, tradition in the colonial South. By the rules of blood-law, the family (or for American Indians, the clan) of a murder victim had a sacred right to kill the murderer, or anyone else in that man’s family or clan, until a balance of blood-for-blood was achieved. *Lex talionis* was (and is) practiced in many cultures, and when practiced justly, is thought to achieve structure within a

¹⁵ *Ocala Evening Star*, September 1-2, 1902

society – to guarantee transgressions were dealt with swiftly, and avoid drawn-out feuds.

On the West End of Alachua County *lex talionis* was not practiced according to those ancient dictates. If it had, only Manny Price would have been executed, blood-for-blood. Robert Scruggs' execution for supplying the pistol would have been a breach of the sacred law and his family could have been owned the life from the family of his murderers. Robert Scruggs was lynched because the justice system actually practiced on the West End was a capricious animal; one that paid lip service to *lex talionis* and the rule of law, but was really just a bastardized version of outlaw justice, with one foot in due process, and one in anarchy.

In 1908, there was another public lynching in Newberry, of a white man named Jack Long who was accused (later thought falsely)¹⁶ of the murder of a well-regarded Jonesville businessman, Elias Sapp. Long was broken out of jail in Newberry by another mob of three-hundred – most likely members of the same mob who'd lynched Price and Scruggs five

¹⁶ *The Ocala Evening Star*, February 7, 1908

years before - and marched in a “death march” single file to a spreading oak tree a quarter of a mile away in an elaborate pseudo-legal ceremony, with a “judge”, guards, and chance to repent. He was hung, then his body riddled with bullets.¹⁷

So common had the lynching of black men become on the West End that early newspaper reports described Long as black. When he was found to be white, a tongue-in-cheek retraction was offered in the Ocala newspaper, that Long “was a white man instead of a negro. It has come to be natural to infer that anyone lynched in this part of the world is a negro.”¹⁸

The “part of the world” the editor referred to was the West Side of Alachua County, which had earned, even before the wild-west era of phosphate mining, a reputation for hard self-sufficiency in all matters, including vigilante justice. In 1883 Carl Webber published a real estate tract that described Alachua County in the dreamy, overwrought language of the day as “a spot where man might live and enjoy the bounties of the

¹⁷ *Gainesville Daily Sun*, February 10, 1908

¹⁸ *Ocala Evening Star*, February 7, 1908

earth with perfect safety to health, life and happiness, and with commensurate remuneration for the toil of his hands and brain.”¹⁹

Webber was less infusive when describing the white citizens who lived on the west side of the county; a place he deemed “...independent of the world, outside their own neighborhood, as it is possible for human beings to be. They raise their own food, make their own clothes, from products raised by their own labor, and think, talk and act as they please in accordance with their own well-regulated social laws.”²⁰

Webber did not put a name to his description, but given the scarcity of population on the West End in 1883, he was almost certainly describing the highly self-sufficient and independent neighborhood of the Dudley Plantation, which by the turn of the century, went by a larger, more encompassing name: The Community of Dudley.

¹⁹ Carl Webber, *Eden of the South*, 1883

²⁰ *ibid*

Chapter Two: A Hell of a Life

When Captain Dudley died in 1880, he left his plantation to his only surviving son, Phillip Benjamin Dudley, Jr., who was called Ben. Born in 1852, Ben Dudley had come of age during the Civil War, at home with his mother and sisters and the family slaves. His daughter described him as a quiet man of stern moral standards, who would not allow cursing or drinking on his property, and thwarted corn thieves by putting traps in the walls of his corn crib.²¹

In 1877, Ben married Fannie Wynne, a woman of similar pioneer stock, who did not share her husband's quiet disposition. A Georgian by birth, Fannie Dudley was a red-head with straight posture and an iron will, who once expressed a desire to "whip the old Nick" out of an erring brother-in-law. Her daughter Myrtle recalls her as being strict with both her children and the family servants; the kind of woman who never had to ask for something twice.²²

²¹ *Dudley Farm, A History of Florida Farm Life* Ben Pinkard with Sally Morrison

²² *ibid*

The partnership of Ben and Fannie Dudley was a strong one. They raised twelve children to adulthood in a time when child-loss from illness was common. When Fannie's mother died in 1883, she and Ben took in her younger siblings to raise. Under their stewardship, the Dudley Plantation increased in acreage and prestige, emerging in the new century with 640 acres that were surrounded by farms owned by members of the extended Dudley family.

Fannie's younger brother, George Wynne, owned forty acres to the north. Their son-in-law, J. J. Jones, who was Alabama-born and had fought in the war with the Captain, farmed the property to the south, and served as post-master. The unincorporated town of Jonesville was named for him, though Dudley was the center of the community. Larger in land mass than Gainesville, it sat at the crossroads of the Gainesville and Jonesville Road. Captain Dudley was said to have chosen the crossroads as the spot to build his homestead back in 1858 when he oversaw the slave crews that cut the road between Archer and Newnansville.²³

23 *ibid*

While most of Jonesville and Newberry had been cut-over by lumber companies, the Dudley homestead was planted in citrus, fruit trees and cedars, giving it a lush and unique North Florida beauty. There were two ponds, numerous caves and fern-grown sinks on the property, making it the perfect place for Cracker cowboys to rest their cattle on a drive, with the blessing of Ben Dudley, who was known for his hospitality to travelers on the road.

The Community of Dudley was the definition of self-sufficiency, with a commissary, a school and a post office, along with the facilities necessary to running a large, diversified farm. There was a tobacco curing shed, a smoke house, a grinding stone for sugar cane and corn; extensive truck gardens, fruit orchards, and pasture, and as of 1882, a house large enough to entertain traveling cowboys, politicians and (according to Myrtle) a curious Seminole or two.



The Dudley Family, about 1900, *Florida Memory Project*

The main house of the plantation, which was begun by Captain Dudley, and finished by Ben, was less neo-classical than Cracker Vernacular, with a high-ceilinged central hallway and wide covered porches on both front and back of the house. The separate kitchen and dining room were large enough to be worlds into themselves – which they were, to the women who kept the fires lit and worked there from sun up till sun down. The yard was swept (which is to say, raked dirt) for better ventilation, the front yard divided into rock-lined flower beds that were

tended by Ben and Fannie's eight daughters, who had a particular love of old roses.

All but the oldest of Ben and Fannie Dudley's children were raised on family homestead, including their youngest daughter, Myrtle, who would eventually bequeath the farm to the State of Florida. She lived there till her death in 1996, and it is through her eyes we have a glimpse of life on the Dudley Plantation, via two recorded sessions of oral history taken with Lisa Heard and Sally Morrison in 1992, when Myrtle was 92.

Renowned for her excellent memory, Myrtle was a forthright woman who kept score, remembered grudges, and wasn't afraid of speaking her mind. She described life at The Community of Dudley in the first half of the century as "a hell of a life" and painted a portrait of a rural farming community that might grumble about the placement of the post office and the school, but was essentially close knit. The signal of distress, three shots in the air, would cause neighboring farmers to drop their plows and rush to each other's aid.²⁴

24 *ibid*

This bond of support among white farmers did not extend to the black farmers of the West End, as Myrtle made abundantly clear in her oral history. She was gratingly offensive when speaking on matters of race, which she often did, as Myrtle was, at 92, an entrenched racist. She rarely mentioned any black tenant or servant by name, and till her death never allowed a black person, even a valued farm hand, into the family home, aside from working domestics.²⁵

The closest she came to, if not warm affection, then at least acknowledgement of skill, is when she spoke of Becky Perkins (1835) who acted as “guardian” over Myrtle’s grandmother and her children when the Captain was off to war. Perkins was Fannie Dudley’s maid, nurse and family nanny, who saved Myrtle’s life when she was born prematurely in 1900. “She was an ex-slave's daughter. That old nigger knew just what she was doing. They did not even dress me until in the spring. They had sheets up like that. I said it looked to me like they took a bed sheet and cut it up in

²⁵ Unnamed source, 2016

two pieces and put me on it. They did not dress me until the spring of the year. They said there was not nothing there to dress.”²⁶

The hard racial language Myrtle used, even when allotting respect, reflected not only the harsh prejudice of her day, but what seems to have been a customary regard the Dudley family had for black people; a regard common in ex-slave holding families, especially ones who’d worked as overseers, as Captain Dudley had done. In an interview with Ron Sachs that appeared in the *Gainesville Sun* in 1977, Myrtle’s brother, Frank Dudley, used similar language, with no fear of contradiction or alienating his audience.

According to Myrtle, she had learned her racial manners at her mother’s knee, noting that Fannie Dudley “...hated niggers the same as I do.”²⁷ She specifically attributes this hatred to the fact that a black man had killed her mother’s brother. That man was Boisy Long. Her Uncle George was Deputy George Wynne.

26 Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

27 *ibid*

Chapter Three: The Deputy

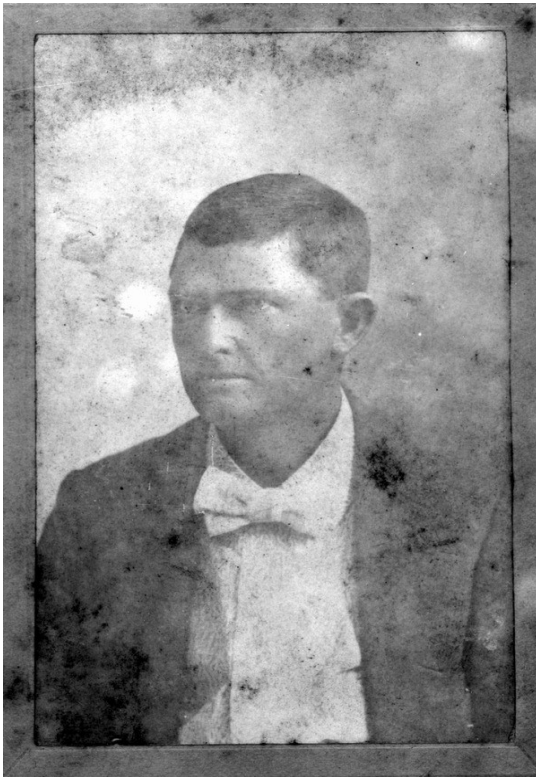
Born in the chaotic days of Reconstruction in Gainesville in 1869, George Wynne was fourteen when his mother died, when he, two brothers and at least one sister were taken in by their sister Fannie to be raised at the Dudley plantation. He was already accounted a man by then, and with his brother-in-law Ben's assistance, homesteaded forty acres directly north of the Dudley homestead.²⁸

On the 1900 census, Wynne is living in his sister's household, with eleven of the Dudley children, who considered their young uncle a beloved older brother. Wynne can read and write, and farmed his own land. Ten years later, on the 1910 census, he is 41-years-old and still living with his brother Tom and his wife and children on their farm adjacent to Dudley, his occupation listed as deputy sheriff.

Wynne had already been elected constable of Newberry by then; a position he took when the previous Town Marshall, C. H. Slaughter, was charged with embezzlement in 1909. Wynne held the position till the time

²⁸ *Dudley Farm, A History of Florida Farm Life* Ben Pinkard and Sally Morrison

of his death (reelected the last time in June, 1916.)²⁹ He was also an Alachua County sheriff deputy, one of fourteen across the county working under the high Sheriff, P. G. Ramsey, who was in his third term in office.



George Wynne, 1910, *Florida Memory Project*

Deputy Wynne's official town constable photograph, taken around 1907, shows a somber, handsome man; one with a future in higher law enforcement; possibly as the high sheriff of Alachua County one day. He

²⁹ *Gainesville Daily Sun*, May 20 1909

certainly had the pedigree, and was already close friends and colleagues with two high-ranking Florida sheriffs: P. G. Ramsey and Ham Dowling, the high sheriff of Duval County.

Myrtle, who was fifteen when her uncle was killed, remembered him as quiet and decisive, and as well-loved in the larger community of the West End and railroad as he was within his family. "Everybody worshiped Uncle George. He was quiet with you. If he told you no, he meant no; if he told you yes, he meant yes."³⁰

Quiet, Wynne may well have been, but he was also a lawman covering Beat Six, which covered the saloons and bordellos of downtown Newberry as well as the Cummer Lumber mill, the turpentine camp at Half-Moon, and fourteen phosphate mines that circled Newberry. All of the industries leased convicts for workers, who were doing time for crimes as small as vagrancy and as large as murder. In 1909 the Gainesville paper reported: "The West End section, where practically all the phosphate mines are located, has been the scene of much disorderly and unlawful conduct,

30 Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

notwithstanding that the mine superintendents and officials have exercised every precaution to check them. This is due largely to the fact that many of the mines have worked convicts who are turned loose upon the community, with the result that they tarry in the vicinity, and trouble follows.”³¹

Wynne’s successful capture of criminals, and the means he used to do it, often made headlines in the local papers in Gainesville. It was not uncommon for him (nor any deputy of that day) to engage in gun battles, and fatally shoot suspects resisting arrest. After his death, it was noted that Wynne “bore the reputation as one of the most fearless officers in Alachua County.”³² He was also noted to have had “many serious encounters with negros.”³³ The headlines in 1909 alone include: **Deputy Wynne Gets Another Bad Negro**³⁴ and **Negro Murderer Caught by Wynne**³⁵, **Deputy Sheriff Was Compelled to Kill**³⁶.

³¹ *Gainesville Daily Sun* September 16, 1909

³² *Gainesville Daily Sun*, August 21, 1916

³³ *The Lakeland Evening Telegram*, August 19, 1916

³⁴ *Gainesville Daily Sun*, September 24, 1909

³⁵ *Gainesville Daily Sun*, February 12, 1909

³⁶ *Gainesville Daily Sun*, March 01, 1909

In September of 1909, a lengthy account of a round-up of suspects was reported in the *Gainesville Sun* under headline: **West End Section Was Very Lively; Promiscuous Raid of Negros in Mining Section.**³⁷ The raid was organized by Wynne and Deputy S. G. Livingston, who were “familiar with conditions in that section and in charge.” The article reports “it was good game the officers captured,” then goes on to list the suspects and their crimes (assault, killing a mule, and theft.)³⁸

The use of hunting imagery as a metaphor for capturing (and sometimes killing) convicts was common in its day, as it was when describing lynchings. Such imagery had two effects: it reduced the convicts to the status of wild animals, while reassuring white citizens that their elected lawman was doing his job, rooting out the “bad Negros” and “Negro Desperados” across the West End, including Newberry, the “bustling metropolis of the West End” three miles west of Dudley.³⁹

³⁷ *Gainesville Daily Sun*, September 16, 1909

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *Gainesville Daily Sun*, August 29, 1907

Chapter Four: A Reputation for Lawlessness

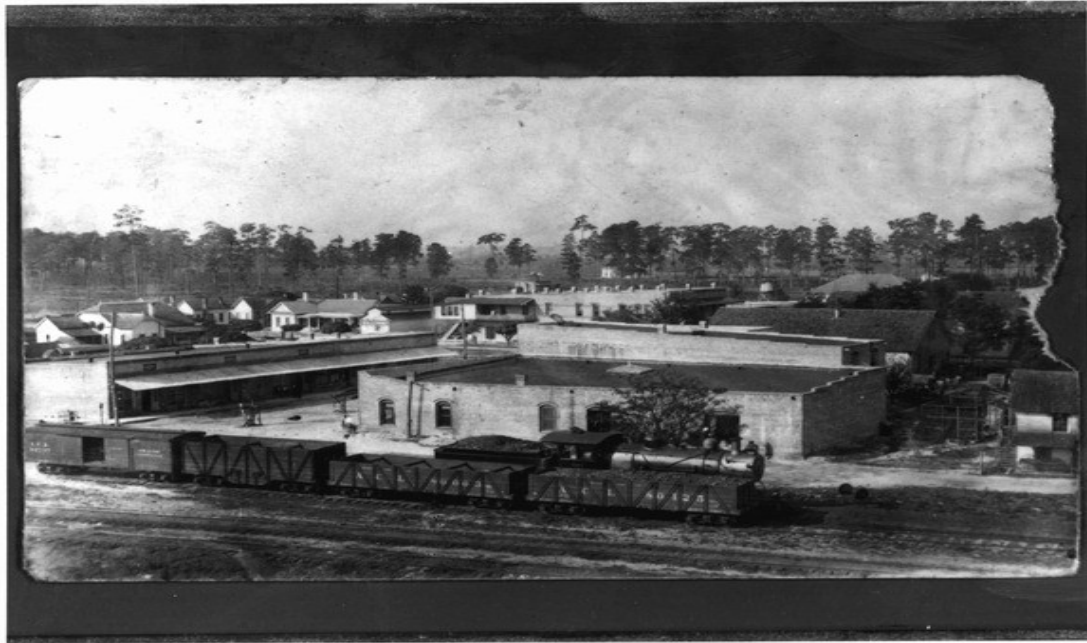
Turn of the century Newberry was considered an upstart by its long established plantation neighbors at Dudley, though it, too, was settled by South Carolinians in 1894 after the Savannah, Florida and Western Railroad was extended from High Springs through the town. Settlers from Newberry, South Carolina named the dirt crossroads Newtown at first, then changed it to Newberry, as if hoping the cut-over bit of wilderness would grow to emulate the gracious living they remembered in the long-established Carolina town.

In the beginning, it seemed not an impossible plan, as Newberry was an up-and-comer in the area; a railroad town thirteen miles west of the county seat in Gainesville that had the good fortune of being built on a bedrock of incalculably valuable hard-rock phosphate. Originally discovered on the far side of Alachua County by Dr. C. A. Simmons in 1880, phosphate was essential in the production of high quality fertilizer. Mining it had burst into production on a large and profitable scale in 1889,

in the Marion Phosphate Company, forty miles south of Newberry in Dunnellon.

Newberry's hard-rock phosphate was considered as rich, and with the new Florida and Savannah (later Atlantic Coastline) Railroad access, it would be easily shipped, first to ports in Savannah, and eventually to Jacksonville. German industrialists invested in the mines, both as owners and buyers, as did the Cummer brothers in Jacksonville, who opened a Phosphate and Lumber operation east of town that out-lastred the Germans.⁴⁰ With the mines came a steady wave of prospectors, speculators, railroad men, and laborers, along with an attendant professional class of merchants, doctors, undertakers and preachers to support them.

⁴⁰ *Newberry The Early Years*, Don L. Davis



Downtown Newberry 1907, *Florida Memory Project*

There was nothing overly fancy about early Newberry. It had dirt streets that would turn into great mud holes in the summer rain, and the entire town had been cut-over for its lumber, leaving it to suffer from a grievous lack of shade (as noted by an unimpressed reporter from *The Crisis* in 1916.) Like much of North Florida, it was pioneer-raw, though it aspired to respectability, and with the phosphate money, quickly assumed a more cultured exterior.

A two-story Romanesque-style bank opened in 1913 a block west of the railroad, anchoring a sturdily middle-class community that contained an opera house, a theatre, several hotels, saloons, a high-end ladies clothing store, an ice plant, a newspaper (*The Newberry Miner*), several physicians and three well-trafficked pharmacies. The city-owned light plant opened in 1916, providing one hour of electricity a night, and a two-cell, eight bed jail was built next door, the iron doors repurposed from the lion cages of the circus train that delighted Newberry children when it passed through town on the way to the coast.⁴¹

The Gothic Romanesque First Baptist Church, with stained windows and a bell tower, opened in 1913, a block west of the bank and two from the depot. The church, depot and bank anchored the downtown, which was soon surrounded by sturdy, high-ceilinged homes of the new professional class. A handful of the houses stand today, early century Queen Annes, Craftsman and Cracker Vernacular, with deep porches and floors made of

⁴¹ Katie Bea Cooke, 1993

local heart pine, so hard that it took a skilled carpenter to successfully drive in a nail by hand.

For a brief few years, the white people in the downtown achieved a life of genteel and artful ease. A puff piece on a social afternoon in a home in downtown Newberry that appeared in the *Tampa Tribune* in mid-August, 1916, a bare week before Deputy Wynne was shot, fairly drips with decorum: "The rooms for the occasion were decorated with potted plants and cut flowers. The guests were received in the drawing room by the hostess and honoree. After several games of cards, a salad course was served and later a delightful musical program was rendered."⁴²

The railroad brought a steady stream of newcomers to the cut-over town: drummers, northern businessmen, and Europeans connected with the mines. But even with the railroad, Southerners were the cultural majority, by far, many of them from former Confederate states that had been devastated by the war, who'd come to Florida for a new start.

⁴² *Tampa Tribune* August 13, 1916

They carried with them both the physical and psychological scars of war, and enforced the Black Codes as rigidly as if they had been handed down by Divine Law. Though blacks outnumbered whites 3-to-1, white supremacy was the working knowledge of the day in a town where minstrel shows were common entertainment, and segregation an accepted fact of life. Black Newberrians lived in far northeast section of town in shacks⁴³ and shot-gun homes, some owned; many rented. Black men worked as hired farm labor, or as menial labor at the ice plant, saloons, livery stables, while “many of the women go out to service to other cities.”⁴⁴ The railroad the town had been built around ran north to south, marking a racial division that would last into the next century.

Life under the Codes was severe, and black Newberrians walked a tight walk of correct behavior, with violence a looming threat, as a local man named William Cowart boldly confessed in a letter-to-the-editor of

43 African-American historian Joel Buchanan, who had family in Jonesville, made a salient point about black people living in shacks in Alachua County in his oral history: that it was often the only housing black people were allowed, and in his experience, usually kept clean as a whistle.

44 *The Crisis*, October 1916

The Crisis, dated April 1, 1911. Cowart⁴⁵, who was a clerk at the Suwannee Drug Company, wrote to explain why southern libraries didn't allow to black patrons. With dripping contempt, he likened black library patrons to animals, and concluded: "The people of the South don't think any more of killing the black fellows than you would think of killing a flea."⁴⁶

Cowart's withering racism was reflective of the mindset of the day, and was particularly aimed at the black laborers, both free and convict, who "moved earth" with pick and hammer at the fourteen mines that surrounded the town, or worked laying ties for the railroad, hacking out the scrub for new highways, or tapping pine in naval stores. The work in those industries was so punishing that the labor supply was perpetually undermanned, with convict labor so pervasive that the West End of the county was considered something of an open air penitentiary. The work camps had the guards, the shotguns and the bloodhounds on staff to chase

⁴⁵ Cowart was the step-brother of William Barry, Senior. On the 1910 Federal Census for Newberry-Archer, Cowart is a drug salesman at the same pharmacy where Lem Harris was employed, the Suwannee Drug Store.

⁴⁶ *The Crisis*, April 1, 1911

fleeing convicts; hounds of such quality that Deputy Livingston made a gift of two of them to Sheriff Ramsey in 1909, to use on county prisoners.⁴⁷

Town Constables like George Wynne were held in high esteem, especially on Saturday nights, when the miners came to town to spend their dollar-a-day wages. Moonshine and bootleg liquor was as easily obtained in Newberry as it was any other small town in Florida, and knifings, shootings and fatal bare-fisted fights were so common that the area required the services of three full-time physicians. Old-timers who remembered turn of the century Newberry often described it with head-shaking wonder, as wild-Newberry lived side-by-side with genteel Newberry, in living contradiction.⁴⁸ A block from the depot (one block from First Baptist) were a pair of notorious bordellos, their existence so accepted that children of the era remember being in awe of the prostitutes and their lacy parasols when they were taken out in the afternoon for their daily carriage ride.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Gainesville Daily Sun*, September 3, 1909

⁴⁸ William Barry, Sr. 1993

⁴⁹ Essie Neagle, 1993

The roller-coaster ride of prosperity that built both sides of the tracks came to an abrupt end in 1914, when the assassination of an Austrian arch-duke touched off the powder keg of World War I. America was still isolationist at that point, but the German industrialists who bought Newberry's phosphate were blocked from doing business when shipping lanes in the Atlantic closed.

There was hope that the war would come to a quick end and mining would resume, but as the months passed into years, bankruptcy notices began to appear in local newspapers as merchants and businesses in Newberry were forced to shutter their doors.

By the summer of 1916, the uncertainty of the war, and Newberry's continuing economic slide made the dog days of August seem longer and hotter than usual. The Florida Governor's race provided a welcome distraction, as the Democratic nomination for governor - rabble-rousing nativist preacher-turned-politician Sidney J. Catts, or his rival, William V. Knott, had split the town down the middle.

Newberry was a political town, with a resident Senator (Gibbs Roland), Newspaper editor Mayor (Wallace Cleves) and well-known magistrate (Judge Ira J. Carter.) It had enough political weight that Sidney J. Catts dropped by in June on his famous automobile-campaign tour and gave a rousing speech. He spoke extemporaneously, and no record of the speech remains, but he almost certainly would have spoken out at the old picnic grounds just west of town, where political speeches were offered under the pleasant shade of a grove of century oaks.

Catts ran on an anti-Catholic, anti-saloon ticket, and was a fervent supporter of vigilante justice and white supremacy. It is interesting to consider the effect that one of his race-baiting, pulpit-hammering speeches might have had on the events that followed that summer, as Catts openly admitted to having killed a black employee on his farm in Alabama in his youth; an event he jokingly referred to as maintaining “a private cemetery for the reception of the less desirable of his negro employes [sic] from time to time.”⁵⁰

50 Wayne Flynt, *Cracker Messiah, Governor Sidney J. Catts of Florida* 1977

The race for the Democratic primary was the talk of the town till the first week of August, when it was edged out of the headlines by a shocking crime close to the heart of phosphate country, when Constable Arthur Olin was shot by a black phosphate worker named Albert Williams in nearby Kendrick.

Olin had arrested Williams, but did not frisk him, and while they sat at the depot, waiting for the train, Williams produced a high-caliber pistol and shot Olin three times before making his escape. Olin was rushed to the hospital in Ocala where none of his wounds proved fatal, and Albert Williams escaped, never to be apprehended.⁵¹ In a follow-up story, the Ocala newspaper made light of the shooting, quipping “it is hard to kill a good man. It is sometimes hard to capture a bad one, for the negro who wounded Mr. Olin has not yet been captured.”⁵²

This good-natured banter, perhaps reflective of relief that Olin had survived with minor injury, was not in evidence that summer on the struggling West End of Alachua County. There, white Jonesville farmers

51 *Ocala Evening Star*, August 7, 1916

52 *Ocala Evening Star*, August 15, 1916

complained of a common and infuriating crime: stolen hogs. Always a staple in sustenance farming, hogs had lately gained value in North Florida as a cash crop after a market for them had opened in Georgia, where they could be shipped by train. Hogs were not only prized for their meat, but for their quick growth, from piglet to market in six months. They were bringing a good price that year – being sold at ten-cent a pound, so a farmer selling ten might make as much as \$100 in profit; a huge return in the day when phosphate miners earned a dollar a day.⁵³

Their rising value had stirred community discord, as it often did in the South in the days before fencing laws, when pigs were allowed to forage at will, identified by ear notches that were cut when they were piglets. The notches were registered with the county, and when it came time to gather hogs for fattening, if the owner's estimation of stock came up short, the possibility of theft was immediately raised. Stealing hogs and changing notches was a serious crime, a felony of Grand Theft under the Black Codes, punishable by up to five years doing back-breaking labor in

⁵³ *The Tampa Tribune* September 10, 1916

one of the local labor camps. With poor fencing and stringent Pig Laws, “there was constant trouble about them.”⁵⁴

The details of the official investigation into the missing hogs in Jonesville is irritatingly incomplete. There is no paper trail to explain if only one family was missing hogs and making the complaint, or if there was truly a neighborhood-wide problem with theft. What little we know of the investigation is drawn from newspaper accounts written after the lynching, the long-form piece in *The Crisis*, and the accounts of Myrtle and Frank Dudley, which were unashamedly biased, but do shed light on the events leading up to the lynching.

In his interview with Ron Sachs in 1977, Frank Dudley recalls that Jonesville farmers were victims of “an organized gang of thieves who’d steal anything that was left loose. It was the biggest problem we had around here back then and the neighbors made up their minds that they were either going to run them niggers out or burn them out.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *The Crisis*, October 1916

⁵⁵ Ron Sachs, Sunday Magazine, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

His time-line of the event is interesting, as it suggests that long before Sheriff Dowling arrested Mills Dennis in Mayport, white farmers in Jonesville had targeted the Dennis family as thieves, and made plans to move on them. Not by affecting their legal arrest, but in a way that had been used in Reconstruction by Jonesville planters, that guaranteed their victims' economic ruin, by burning them out.

Sadly, we have no record of Deputy Wynne's opinion of this vigilante plot; whether his arrest of Mills Dennis and attempted arrest of Boisy Long were the first move in a plan to burn out the black farmers, or if it was preemptive, to *avoid* it.

What we do know, is that the first arrest connected to the investigation into the hog thieves was of 18-year-old Mills Dennis on Wednesday night, August 16, 1916 near Mayport, in Duval County. Sheriff W. H. Dowling arrested Dennis on the charge of hog-stealing - not of Duval County hogs, but Alachua County ones, as Deputy George Wynne was sent to Jacksonville the next day to take Dennis into custody.

Wynne brought Dennis back to Gainesville by the late train, where he put him in jail. By one account, "After Dennis had been placed in the Newberry (sic) jail, the deputy was notified that two other members of the gang of negro thieves were in a vacant shack on the outskirts of the town."⁵⁶

Wynne had a warrant written for another member of Mills Dennis' family – his cousin, and adopted brother, who was well-known to Wynne, a neighbor for his entire life. That man was Boisy Long.

⁵⁶ *The Lexington Progress*, August 25, 1916

Chapter Four: The Accused

For over a hundred years, the four men and two women who were lynched in Newberry in 1916 were nearly lost to history. The place of their deaths – still called Lynch Hammock – was remembered, if in abstract, but the victims themselves, if remembered at all, were disembodied names, frequently misspelled, on an anonymous fatality roll.

The thoroughness of the century-long silence is complex. Foremost is the oath of silence members of the mob took on the night of August 19, where they were made to touch the rope to assure their complicity with the murders. So intimidating was the oath that even the children of the murderers, who grew up in Newberry, tell the same story: of never hearing so much as a whisper about that night. If they walked in on a conversation where it was being discussed, the room would fall to immediate silence, with no questions acknowledged, answered or allowed.

The descendants of the Newberry Six have also largely remained silent, refusing to discuss the lynching with people outside their community. Jim Dennis' children, who were present when his battered

corpse was brought home by their mother on the morning of August 18, were so profoundly traumatized that they feared for their personal safety if they spoke of it on the record, even eighty years later.⁵⁷

There is also the lingering stigma the families have long endured, of being labeled thieves. The accusation, which was never proven in any court of law, is part and parcel of the 1916 story; the moral transgression that was put forth as excuse for the entire event. The descendants of the families have denied the charges for a hundred years, to little effect, as it is now a set piece in the historic record.

Despite these monumental silences, the lives of the Newberry Six can be reconstructed by the slim historic records that remain, primarily the United States Federal Census, and newspaper accounts of the day. The census is not fail proof, but is more liable than the newspapers, as it is a standardized federal record, not tainted by the echo-chamber effect that was created by the handful of stringer reporters who descended on Newberry in the wake of the lynching. On deadline and in hot competition,

⁵⁷ Claudia Adrien, *Gainesville Sun*, September 4, 2005

they tapped out stories that were conflicting, and when in agreement, were cannibalized versions of previous reporters.

The federal census from 1880, 1900 and 1910 offer a sounder overview of the lives of Jim Dennis, Bert Dennis, Mary and Mariah Dennis, Stella Young, Andrew McHenry, and Josh Baskins, who were local people, born and bred in The Community of Dudley, as were their parents. The finer details of their lives before they were lynched was largely overlooked by the white press, though *The Crisis*, who produced the only long-form piece, offers a glimpse of these black farmers' lives in Jonesville in 1916: "Most of the land is under cultivation. Four or five large farms lie among the road, but most of them are small farms. Roads branch off from the main road leading to other farms. The chief products are cotton, corn, some sugar cane, peanuts, pecans, melons, cucumbers, and other garden truck. A large number of the farmers are Negroes. They own their own land, to a large extent, and are prosperous."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *The Crisis*, October 1916

The Dennis, Young, McHenry and Long families were among those small farmers, who lived and worked on the edge of the the most prominent farm of the area – the Dudley Plantation.

(Note: Names are followed by date of birth. If family members were born in South Carolina before 1865, they very likely came to the area as Dudley slaves, or from the neighboring Cottonwood, Arredondo or Stringfellow plantations. They were not part of the immigration of black laborers that came with the phosphate boom, but were, in 1916, mostly farmers. For the sake of clarity, the names of the Newberry Six are listed in bold print.)

Like George Wynne, Boisy Long (1887) was an orphan, who lost his mother as a child, and was taken in to be raised by two close-knit families – the Dennis/Long's, and Young/McHenry's. So intertwined was Long's connection to these two families that newspaper accounts of the day variously described them as his cousins, in-laws and adopted family.

They were, in degrees, all three.

Long himself was born in 1887 on J. J. Jones' farm⁵⁹, just south of the Dudley homestead on the Jonesville Road. Long's orphaned status makes him difficult to trace on the census, as he sometimes went by other family names: Boisy Randolph, or Boisy Dennis. Family members say he was "taken into be raised" by the Dennis family, who were his cousins.*⁶⁰

One of those cousins was **Jim Dennis** (1873) who appears on the 1910 census living in Jonesville with his wife, Julia (1887). They own their own property and after five years of marriage have three small children. The reporter for *The Crisis*, described Boisy Long and Jim Dennis as neighbors, their houses "rather pleasantly located on a little rise of land on the [Gainesville] road, and are of the ordinary shanty type."⁶¹

Jim Dennis had deep roots in the Jonesville area. He was the son of Anthony Dennis (1852) and Jane Long Dennis (1855), who have five children on the 1890 census. Though Anthony and Jane cannot read, their children, **Jim**, **Mary**, Mills, **Maria** and Phillip can. Anthony's mother, Maria

⁵⁹ Unnamed source, Jonesville 2014

⁶⁰ Claudia Adrien, *Gainesville Sun*, September 4, 2005

⁶¹ *The Crisis*, October 1916

Dennis (1820) – for whom her granddaughter was likely named - was born in South Carolina. She appears on the 1870 census of Newberry, with six offspring living in her household, and works as farm labor.

Boisy Long and **Jim Dennis** were most likely cousins through the family of Jim's mother, Jane, who was born a Long, and married a Dennis. After Anthony Dennis' death in 1907, Jane married Allen Elliot. She and her new husband appear in the 1910 in a blended, multigenerational household, with two sons still living at home, and two daughters: **Maria (1888)** (whose name is sometimes transcribed as **Mariah**), and **Mary (1885)**. Both sisters are widows with small children. They can read and write and are employed as farm labor. The patriarch of the Long family, Jane's father, Lewis Long (1820), lives with them in 1910, at ninety-years-old. He was born in Georgia, and can read and write. **Jim Dennis'** older brother **Gilbert "Bert" Dennis** lives in nearby Archer on the 1910 census with his wife and children. He is employed at a local lumber mill.

The census data indicates that the Dennis family was moving in an upward trajectory at the turn of the century. They were slaves in 1860,

renters in 1900, and farm owners in 1910, with literate children, who were steadily employed. Even the family's oldest member, Lewis Long, born in 1820, could read and write.

There aren't many people alive today who can speak to the personality of the Dennis family a full century after their deaths. One exception is the Reverend W. G. Mayberry, a native of Jonesville, who grew up on stories told to him by his grandmother. At a memorial for the lynching at Pleasant Plain Methodist in 2016, he described the black community of Jonesville in 1916 as poor, but aspiring; not above eating gopher and armadillo if that was the only meat to be had.

Mayberry's grandmother knew the Dennis family and their adopted brother, Boisy Long. He paused a moment before he could find the word to accurately describe them, and settled on *resolute*.

The census reflects that opinion.

The Young/McHenry Family

The Young/McHenry family were also neighbors of Boisy Long on the 1910 census, living four households down from the Dudley homestead,

making them very close neighbors, indeed. Becky Perkins, who was a favored Dudley servant, was another neighbor, indicating that the Young and McHenry siblings were well acquainted with the Dudley family, though they owned their own land, and were not Dudley tenants.

On the 1910 census, the head of the Young/McHenry family is a preacher, Reverend William Young, who was born in South Carolina in 1846 (according to census; his tombstone at Pleasant Plain says 1854.) His wife, Della Stark (1860), was born in Georgia, and was a McHenry before she married William Young. They have a blended family of seven children, five of them McHenrys: Malle, **Andrew**, **Estella** (1890), Frank, and George. **Andrew “Rue” McHenry** (1888) works for his step-father on the home farm, as does his younger sister, **Estella “Stella” Young**, who by 1916 was Boisy Long’s wife, the mother of at least one of his children.

The Young/McHenry family is doubtlessly one of the “prosperous black farmers” of the Jonesville area *The Crisis* mentions in their piece, who can all read and write, and own their own property. William Young’s grandmother, Jennie Childs (1819) lives with them. She was born in South

Carolina, as were her parents, and though she cannot read or write, her children and grandchildren can; an indication that the Young and McHenry family were, like their neighbors, building steadily improving lives.

The Baskins

The Reverend **Joshua Baskins** was the oldest of the Newberry Six, born in 1871 in Jonesville, a younger son of Ruben (1837) and Eliza Baskins (1846), who were born in South Carolina. **Josh Baskins** grew up in the Jonesville area, in a family that shows the same improvement of circumstances that the other families enjoyed. His parents rented their house and were illiterate farm labor in 1880. By 1900, his siblings who were still living in his parent's household were "in school" – possibly attending the black school at Great Liberty Hill, as the Baskins lived two miles east of Dudley, toward Rutledge.

As an adult, **Joshua Baskin** could read and write, and was both a farmer and a Methodist preacher. In 1910 he and his wife, Ellen, had been

married thirteen years and have two daughters, who have attended school and also can read and write. The family rents their home and all of them are employed as farm labor.

These are the families of the Newberry Six, all farmers, or farm labor, who were already in the crosshairs of a vigilante action when George Wynne was shot, if Frank Dudley is to be believed. Whether they had thieves among them is difficult to judge from a hundred year's distance, though (again) it's important to remember that the allegations were made *after* they were lynched, by the men who had murdered them, who are, in the long light of history, not nearly as reliable witnesses as they seemed to be in their own day.

The relationship the Dennis/Long's, and Young/McHenry's families had with the Dudley's is also difficult to gauge, without written, and very little oral history, on either side of the racial divide. There was certainly no love lost between the Dudley's and black people in general, as as both Myrtle and Frank demonstrate, and in the summer of 1916, even aside from

the hog-stealing rumors, relations between the neighbors were even poorer than usual, or so Myrtle hints several times in her oral history. Apparently Harvey Dudley, the oldest son of Ben and Fannie Dudley, carried a grudge against a local black preacher – one so bitter that Ben made him accompany his mother to Jacksonville to keep him out of the Newberry fray. “He stayed here and let Mother go with Harvey. I am glad he carried Harvey, because there was a special nigger they did not get that Harvey would have got.”⁶²

Myrtle insisted the preacher wasn’t **Joshua Baskins**, but *another* black preacher; one the mob did not lynch. She did not provide the name of the black preacher, or why Harvey Dudley was so set on killing him, leaving an intriguing, and likely unsolvable mystery; one makes a salient point: there is much we do not know.

What we *do* know is that the basic narrative of the Newberry lynching – that a random deputy was shot while arresting an equally random hog thief - is a simplistic, streamlined summary that ignores a far

62 Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

deeper history. That history included an on-going, 50-year-old tribal war between white and blacks on the West End, which had ended in blood shed many times before, both legally and in vigilante action. It absolutely informed the actions of the two men who faced each other in the vacant tenant shack in the early morning hours of August 18, 1916, high-caliber pistols in hand.

The results were tragic. In the context of their broader history, it is hard to imagine it otherwise.

Chapter Five: A Vacant Shack on the Edge of Town

The domino-fall of events that led to the lynching of the Newberry Six began on Wednesday, August 16, 1916, when Duval County Sheriff W. H. Dowling arrested Mills Dennis outside of Mayport on the charge of hog stealing.⁶³ It is unclear how Dowling came to arrest Mills Dennis in rural Duval County, two counties northeast of Alachua, but he did, and alerted Deputy Wynne, who went to the Jacksonville jail on Thursday, August 17 to take custody of the prisoner.

Wynne brought Dennis back by a late train to Gainesville where another warrant was sworn out for Dennis' cousin and adopted brother, Boisy Long.⁶⁴ Long was said to be hiding with another black man in a "vacant shack" between Jonesville and Newberry, and despite the lateness

⁶³ *Forgotten Heroes: Police Officers Killed in Early Florida, 1840-1925*, William Wilbanks, 1998

⁶⁴ *If Long's arrest had gone according to the standard procedure, he would have been taken to jail in Newberry, and tried before Judge Ira Carter for hog-stealing, which would have been Grand Larceny. If found guilty, he would have been sentenced to one to five years as convict labor, very likely in one of local labor camps, to hack out the flatwoods in the construction of the Dixie Highway, work at a turpentine camp, or "sent to the mines."

of the hour, Wynne stopped to arrest him, accompanied by two white men from Newberry, Grady Blount and Lem Harris.⁶⁵

Blount was a newcomer to Newberry who worked as an overseer at a local lumber camp, and made extra income hiring out as a driver of a new eight-cylinder car he owned, of which he was very proud.⁶⁶ Harris was a popular young pharmacist in Newberry who had a wife and two small sons, one an infant.



⁶⁵ *Lakeland Evening Telegram*, August 19, 1916

⁶⁶ *Tampa Tribune*, August 13, 1916

Drs. Getzen, Ruff and Lem Harris, 1911, *Florida Memory Project*

A native of Columbia County, Harris would survive his wounds and move to Clearwater in 1928. According to his great-granddaughter,⁶⁷ his descendants rarely, if ever, spoke of the shooting in Newberry, and had no clue why Harris accompanied Deputy Wynne in the arrest of Boisy Long. *The Crisis* reported that there were rumors that Harris owned the stolen hogs,⁶⁸ which is possible, though Harris and his wife had just built a new house in downtown Newberry, and had no farm property in Jonesville. Why a young pharmacist would be deputized to help arrest a man later described as being “possessed of a mean disposition” is difficult to say, and is but one of the small mysteries that surround the night.

There is also the issue of why Deputy Wynne served the warrant at 2 am in the morning. Some newspapers indicated that it was simply a matter of convenience; a stop between the Gainesville and Newberry jails. In the furiously penned article that appeared in *The Crisis*, the timing of the arrest

⁶⁷ M. Harris, 2018

⁶⁸ *The Crisis*, October 1916

was called out as improper; “an extraordinary thing to do – to go out on a lonely road to arrest a man at this hour.”⁶⁹

To Deputy Wynne, the timing of the arrest might not have seemed so extraordinary, as the lonely road was well known to him; literally his own backyard. The timing may have been chosen for convenience – it was on Blount and Harris’ way home to Newberry – but it was more likely chosen because Boisy Long had a reputation for “meanness” and was a member of a large and *resolute* family. Wynne, who had a reputation as a strategic thinker when it came to taking in suspects, probably wanted to catch Long when he was unarmed, and less capable of resistance, just wakened from sleep.

69 *ibid*

At trial,⁷⁰ both the State, and Boisy Long agree that Long was in bed asleep when Wynne and Harris knocked at his door and woke him. Wynne arrested him for theft and told him to get dressed. He did not search Long for a weapon since he had just awakened him from bed, and while Long got dressed, checked his bedcovers for a weapon, with Lem Harris covering them both, pistol in hand.

According to the State's case, Long sat on the bed while getting dressed, and as Wynne searched his pillow, drew a pistol he had strapped to his waist and shot Wynne in the abdomen, knocking him to the floor. Harris, who was also armed, tried to wrestle the gun from Long, and was shot in the shoulder and twice in the hands.

⁷⁰ Quotes taken from the trial transcript are sourced from William Wilbanks' *Forgotten Heroes: Police Officers Killed in Early Florida, 1840-1925* which was published in the late 1998. A records request made to the Alachua County Courthouse answered that the trial transcript is no longer available, other than two pages of handwritten notes from the Special Term of the Court on September 7, 1916. The names of the jury is listed, along with the charges and verdict. Lem Harris, Grady Blount and Tom Wynne are all listed as witnesses, though the record of Harris' testimony in the trial transcript itself is unknown; a grievous loss, as Harris was an eye-witness.

Long shot Wynne a final time as he made his escape through the door. Wynne returned fire, the bullet “taking effect” and making Boisy Long stumble before he regained his footing and disappeared into the night in his bedclothes.⁷¹

Boisy Long’s testimony of the evening, under oath at his trial differed in a few details. He agreed that Wynne woke him from bed to arrest him, and told him to get dressed. Long testified that his pistol was laying on his shirt, on a chair behind the door. When he reached to pick up the pistol to get to his shirt, Wynne caught the movement and shot him. Long returned fire, or in his own words “went to shooting both ways and run.”⁷²

At trial, Wynne’s Jacksonville doctor testified to the location of his wounds: four of them, two to his liver, then through his wrist and lungs; the first two considered the fatal.⁷³ Boisy Long was not autopsied after his death, and if he was ever treated for his wounds by a doctor, there is no

⁷¹ *Forgotten Heroes: Police Officers Killed in Early Florida, 1840-1925*, William Wilbanks, 1998

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ *ibid*

record of their exact placement. A front entrance wound would support his testimony (of Wynne shooting first.) A back entrance wound would support the State's case: that Long was shot by Wynne as he escaped through the front door.

Grady Blount took the stand and gave an ear-witness account of the night, as he didn't go inside, but was waiting in his car when he heard six shots in rapid succession. He ran inside and found Harris and Wynne "writhing in blood." According to Blount, Deputy Wynne told him that he was going to die; that they must save Harris.⁷⁴

Blount got them into his car, and drove them three miles west to Drs. Getzen and Weeks in downtown Newberry. Their arrival caused a dreaded commotion in the neighborhood in the still-dark hours. Harris had lost a lot of blood, but the wounds to his hands and shoulder were treatable. George Wynne's abdominal wounds were far more grievous; so extensive that the Newberry physicians immediately deemed them fatal.

74 *ibid*

Wynne, who was still conscious, knew that he was mortally wounded, and asked to be taken to his sister's house at Dudley to die, but someone – possibly Sheriff Ramsey (who Myrtle refers to as “the state man”) - insisted on sending him to the Roger's Sanitarium in Jacksonville for an operation that might save his life.⁷⁵

Several accounts say that Wynne was taken by train to Jacksonville, but Katie Bea Weeks Cooke, who was a child in 1916, said that her uncle, Henry Tucker, drove Deputy Wynne to the depot in Waldo in his model T Ford. Tucker was making for the depot in Gainesville, where Wynne could be put on the Jacksonville train, till Wynne, barely conscious, rose up in the back seat and reminded him that the western gate of the University of Florida was locked at 10 pm at night. Wynne's last words were: “The gates will be locked,” before he lost consciousness and fell back in the seat.

Tucker avoided the locked gate by taking Wynne to the depot in Waldo, where the Atlantic Coastline held the train for him for an hour.

⁷⁵ *Lakeland Evening Telegram*, August 19, 1916

From Myrtle Dudley we have a first-hand account of the Dudley families' reaction to the news of the shooting, sometime in the pre-dawn hours of August 18. "...we kids all ran out to see what was the matter. Mother went to crying so when they told her how Uncle George was shot."⁷⁶

Fannie left to meeting him at the depot in Waldo, taking along Harvey to keep him out of the brewing trouble. According to Myrtle, "They got him back to here, and then they got him on to Newberry and caught the train up here on the other side of Alachua and held it until they could get him and carry him to Jacksonville. But he was dead when they got him to Jacksonville. Mother said that if she had seen him before he left up yonder, she would not have let them carry him."⁷⁷

Fannie Dudley wanted to bring her brother's body back to Jonesville for burial, but was overruled, possibly by Sheriff Dowling, who would

⁷⁶ Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

⁷⁷ *ibid*

have been the decision-maker in Jacksonville. They feared the fury of the mob in Newberry, and judged a funeral there would be too incendiary.

George Wynne was buried in the town of his birth, Quitman, Georgia, in the Wynne family plot. His funeral was held on Saturday, and was well attended, both by his extended family, and a slate of deputies, railroad men and local politicians, who took the hour-long train ride to Quitman to pay their respects.

Chapter Six: All the Country Up in Arms

Holding George Wynne's funeral in Quitman did little to stem the rising fury that took hold of the West End in the pre-dawn hours of Friday, August 18, as word spread of the shooting. Sheriff Ramsey immediately formed a posse to track Boisy Long that was armed with "shotguns, rifles, pistols, or anything they could use to help the posse."⁷⁸

They were on horseback, and before dawn broke, rode back to Jonesville to search for Long, who they knew was wounded. Lyman Long, who was a small child, and neighbor of the Dennis family, remembered the men on white horses, who came with the Sheriff to question his father about Boisy Long.⁷⁹

Jim Dennis, Boisy Long's neighbor and cousin, was the first lynching victim. Newspapers reported that Dennis was killed while resisting arrest, but Frank Dudley, from the comfort of his front porch, sixty years later, recalled it differently. "White neighbors went around to every nigger house and told them to stay inside that night. That was a point made especially

⁷⁸ Ron Sachs, Sunday Magazine, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

⁷⁹ Claudia Adrien, *Gainesville Sun*, September 4 2005

strong to the niggers in that Dennis home.”⁸⁰ When Jim Dennis was later seen outside his house and “could not explain his presence” he was shot twice in the back with a shotgun. Another mob member turned Dennis’ body over and shot him in the face with a .38 pistol.⁸¹

Dudley identified one of the shooters as a neighbor, and several news accounts point to a Deputy, most likely either Livingston or Bruton. One account points to Sheriff Ramsey himself.⁸² Landis Ross, the son of a Jonesville farmer named Albert Ross, who was a teenager in 1916, had a different account of Jim Dennis’ murder. He said the mob took Jim Dennis away in an automobile, to interrogate him. When they arrived at the interrogation spot – somewhere close to Dudley, if not *at* Dudley - they ordered him to open the gate, then shot him in the back of the head in the drive, so violently that pieces of his skull were embedded in a nearby post.⁸³

80 Ron Sachs, Sunday Magazine, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

81 *ibid*

82 *Pensacola News Journal*, August 20, 1916

83 *A History of Florida Through Black Eyes*, Marvin Dunn, 2016

Frank Dudley's account made light of Jim Dennis' murder, retelling it in a cavalier way that did not name names, or expose the exact location the mob took Jim Dennis before killing him. He also neglects to mention that Jim Dennis was a family man, who had committed no crime; whose wife and young children were left to hitch their wagon and collect his corpse, which had been shot beyond recognition; a task so grievous that his children trembled when they remembered it in old age.⁸⁴

By the time **Jim Dennis** was murdered at 10 am on Friday morning, the posse – which was steadily growing in size, from official posse to unruly mob - had been searching for Boisy Long for seven hours. Their hope of catching him must have seemed less likely by the minute, and with the outright murder of Jim Dennis, a faction of men, described as George Wynne's "closest friends" struck out on their own, searching the three-miles stretch of the Gainesville Road between Dudley and Newberry.⁸⁵

These men were the most aggressive portion of the mob, and presumably

⁸⁴ Unnamed source, 2014

⁸⁵ *The Crisis*, October, 1916

the ones who'd abducted and murdered **Jim Dennis**. They were ones who'd decided to "clean up"⁸⁶ the hog thieving ring, which led to the arrest and abuse, and final murder of the larger Dennis family.

Jim Dennis' older brother **Gilbert "Bert" Dennis** who lived in Archer with his wife and children, and worked for a sawmill (he is listed on the state record as Burke Dennis) was arrested when he went into Newberry to buy his brother a coffin. **Jim Dennis'** sisters, **Mary** and **Maria Dennis** were arrested at their family home, which was next door to Jim Dennis' house, where Boisy Long's wife, **Stella Young**, and her half-brother **Andrew "Rew" McHenry** were also arrested. *The Crisis* noted that **Mary Dennis** was the mother of four, and pregnant, and **Stella Young** the mother of two.

Press accounts say they were charged with aiding and abetting a fleeing felon, but the charges were never adjudicated, but seem pinned to the weekend in afterthought, in footnote. Frank Dudley says they were warned to stay home, then arrested when they disobey the order, but it's

⁸⁶ Ron Sachs, Sunday Magazine, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

difficult to judge if they were actually arrested in any capacity at all.⁸⁷ The Dennis, McHenrys and Long family lived next door to one another and it seems more likely that they were at first confronted, then rounded up by the mob, more hostage than suspect. The deputies on the posse had at least one good reason to take control of them and physical prevent them from leaving, or talking: they were witnesses to Jim Dennis' murder.

Most newspaper account at the time reported that they were taken and held in the circus-barred jail in Newberry, which was small accommodation – two cells, with four bunks either, hardly more than 10 x 10 wide. The jail was on City property, two blocks from downtown, on a leg of the railroad line, and might have housed some of the accused, though Frank Dudley is curiously insistent that they weren't held at the jail at all, but somewhere else.⁸⁸ He is coy with exact names and locations, though Myrtle mentions in an aside that the Dudley property was where the men went; where the "action was."

⁸⁷ Boisy Long testified at trial that his escape was alone and unaided

⁸⁸ Ron Sachs, Sunday Magazine, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

Josh Baskins, who was older than the others, and later called the “ring leader,” was taken from his wagon on the Old Gainesville Road by the men in the automobiles as he returned to his farm in Jonesville from market day in Newberry, possibly on Friday afternoon.

Most newspaper accounts, and hence, most histories, say Josh Baskins was lock up in the Newberry jail, and hung with the others, but Frank Dudley said that Baskins was not taken to the jail, but hung, presumably at the old picnic grounds where the others would soon be lynched.

Myrtle insisted that Baskins was not the black preacher who had incurred Harvey Dudley’s wrath, but his death did warrant a higher level of violence. Members of the black community in Jonesville passed on, in oral history, that a member of the mob with skill as a tanner cut a long slice of skin from Baskins’ back that he planned to cure and weave into the tip of a cracker whip.⁸⁹ The man who took this grisly souvenir was said to be a doctor.

⁸⁹ Unnamed source

As news of Jim Dennis' murder spread, the black community on the West End sought shelter in Gainesville. The Black Codes restricted their ownership of firearms, and they had no means of defending themselves against the armed white men who poured into the area from outlying regions – as many as 1500 by some estimates. They crisscrossed the woods and drove the rough highways, not only searching for Boisy Long, but for any members of his family. Long's pre-teen son is said to have hidden in a phosphate mine, or in Warren Cave at San Felasco, which was in the direction of Rutledge, the location of the old Freeman's Bureau, making it a natural direction to escape from the fury of the white mob. Boisy Long possibly hid there, too, though the location of his exact hide-out is not known, other than unverified sightings along the Jonesville/Gainesville divide in the area of the Stringfellow plantation.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ *The Tampa Tribune*, August 20, 1916

An aspect of the lynching that was ignored in the press in 1916, and seldom mentioned since are the details of what happened to the six who were arrested – Bert, Mary, and Mariah Dennis; Andrew McHenry and Stella Young – between mid-morning on Friday, and 2 am early Saturday morning. Newspaper accounts skimmed over the details, leaving readers with a false idea of swift frontier justice: arrested for a crime, jailed, then broken out and lynched in a near-legal procession.

There is no part of the weekend more veiled in silence, or sunk in shame than the fifteen hours between the arrests on Friday morning and the lynching at 2 am the next morning, and many questions still remain. Where the accused taken to Newberry to be interrogated at the jail, or were they held in Jonesville, within sight distance of the Dudley Homestead? Were they kept together, or separated? Was Deputy Ramsey present for their interrogation, or were they taken by the faction of the mob that was said to be the most violence – the men in the automobiles?

Wherever it took place, at the jail or in Jonesville, the long hours of interrogation, when they “refused to give information” had to have been

an emotional and loud ordeal, as all of the suspects were related: siblings, cousins and a sister-in-law. Mary Dennis was pregnant, and her sister Mariah had an infant in arms. They were at the mercy of a mob whose fury was already at a fever pitch at the escape of Boisy Long when news came at noon from Jacksonville that George Wynne had died.

Even Myrtle Dudley, who seldom lacked for words when describing grievance, found it hard to adequately depict the mob's rage. She repeatedly described it as so physically transforming that it made them unrecognizable. "They were in such a tantrum and I do not know what all you would call it. But they did not look natural,"⁹¹ she said.

Their grief at losing a friend to homicide is understandable, but there was an element in their rage – livid and transforming – that went beyond mere grief. They were appalled, literally aghast, that a black man; a son of slaves, had shed the blood of the son of a planter; a white man with a reputation as the fiercest deputy on the force.

91 Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

The extent of their retaliation is a measure of their arrogance, that lead them to violence so extreme that it was not recorded in the newspaper columns of the day, aside from *The Crisis*, which noted “that it is said that the two women were tortured for information.”⁹²

Frank Dudley admits to the beating of Maria Dennis (which he minimalizes to “taking a strap to her bottom”) who had an infant with her.⁹³ He says she was then set free and told to leave town in consideration of her baby; an admission the black community of Newberry and Jonesville frankly doubt. It is more commonly believed that Mariah didn’t leave town at all, but was murdered. In black Jonesville, there are stories of her being dragged by an automobile; stories that are only whispers, with no evidence to support or deny, as both she and her baby disappear from the census afterward, which indicates she either didn’t survive, or changed her name, as many survivors of racial violence did.⁹⁴

⁹² *The Crisis*, October, 1916

⁹³ Ron Sachs, Sunday Magazine, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

⁹⁴ Unnamed source, 2014

One of the few first-hand accounts of the lost hours on Friday are courtesy of Myrtle Dudley, who offered a unique snapshot of the day from ground zero, at the Dudley homestead, beginning in the pre-dawn hours when news arrived that George Wynne had been shot. Myrtle remembered that Fannie, “went to crying” while Ben was more practical. He told his oldest son, Harvey, to go with his mother to Jacksonville, and put his oldest daughter, Laura in charge of her sisters, and told them to stay in the house, even if she had to switch them.⁹⁵

“He told us to get in the house and stay there, and we done it. We would go upstairs a time or two and peep out. If he heard us up there, he would tell us to get downstairs where we belonged. But he said he thought he would be better with all the girls. All of the eight girls were here. He sent Frank, my brother, on a horse or mule the next morning to tell Aunt Nerva. When he got to the other end of this lane, [there were] four dead niggers piled up in a pile. He like to have went to pieces.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

⁹⁶ *ibid*

Myrtle's memory of the day are like all of her memories in connection with the lynching: selective and self-serving when it comes to protecting her father, and putting him in the best light. But even beyond her insistence that Ben stayed home with his daughters – which was highly unlikely (and in fact, she later contracts) she recalls the day as one of great tension and grievous sorrow, of she and her seven sisters shut up in a hot house in August, surrounded by the rage of the mob, and terrified that local blacks would retaliate and “kill every one of them.”⁹⁷

Myrtle puts the center of action at the Dudley homestead, and not three miles away at the Newberry jail. A white witness reported seeing members of the Dudley family braiding the lynching ropes on the table of the kitchen of the Dudley home,⁹⁸ which was, according to Myrtle, “where the action was.”⁹⁹

She reported Frank seeing corpses there “at the end of the lane,” and by his own admission, he was part of the posse, as were, presumably, Ben

97 *ibid*

98 *A History of Florida Through Black Eyes*, Marvin Dunn, 2016

99 Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

and all of his sons, aside from Harvey. By the law of blood-revenge such would be their right, though in Jonesville, the rules of the blood vengeance were not applied justly. If they had, the killing would have ended with Jim Dennis, blood for blood. The continued violence, including the capture and torture of the larger Dennis family was not only barbaric, but it was unjust, not only by the standards of modern American law, but even by the harsh eye-for-an-eye law of frontier justice.

Like all racial constructs, the lines that were drawn at the Dudley Plantation that weekend were far more complicated than simple black and white. Even as the ropes were being braided in the Dudley kitchen, and the murderous mob combed the Gainesville Road, some black families came to Ben Dudley for protection, and were granted it.¹⁰⁰ They were most likely the families of valued servants and tenants seeking sanctuary from the vengeful mob, not just for themselves, but for their families. Their motives

¹⁰⁰ *Dudley Farm, a History of Florida Farm Life* Ben Pinkard

were pure survival, but would contribute to a rift in the black community in Jonesville that would last a hundred years.

There were also rifts in the white community, even in the extended family of George Wynne. Not all of Community of Dudley joined or supported the mob, which had quickly passed from any semblance of justice to an unreasoning and irrational force capable of turning on anyone who denied it. Dixie Jones, the son of J. J. Jones (for whom Jonesville was named), who owned the farm where Boisy Long was raised, had known him all his life. A descendant says that Jones walked the floor all day, terrified that Long would come to him for assistance, and the mob turn their eye on him in vengeance, though he was a close cousin.¹⁰¹

Indeed, members of the mob itself were not immune to fear. According to oral history in the black community, some of the white men had second thoughts on going through with the lynching. These men wanted to set the captives, or at least the women, free. According to the African-American community of Jonesville, it was a black man in

¹⁰¹ Unnamed source, 2013

attendance, one well-regarded in the community, who reminded them that the prisoners were witnesses. They knew who they were, and what they'd done, and could identify them if they were freed.¹⁰²

The fear of being identified by witnesses caused them to go along with the lynching, which took place at 2 am in the morning; a time likely chosen as it was the one-day anniversary of Deputy Wynne's shooting, when **Bert Dennis, Mary Dennis, Stella Young** and **Andrew McHenry** were broken out of the Newberry jail and taken to the old picnic ground where **Josh Baskins** had already been hung.¹⁰³

Unlike most of unshaded, cut-over Newberry, the old picnic ground was still lush and shady, the spreading live oaks so pleasant a grove that it was often used for picnics, and political rallies; possibly the site of Sidney J. Catts' stump-speech two months earlier. Other lynchings had been done there before –most notably Jack Long, in 1909. The mob likely followed the template that was used in Long's lynching: a "judge" appointed to sentence them, and a moment allowed for them to repent and "prepare to

102 Reverend Willie Mayberry, Jonesville, 2016

103 Ron Sachs, Sunday Magazine, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

meet their Maker.” Their stern, fake court was interrupted when a handful of curious high schoolers from Newberry High were detected in the trees, spying.

They were hustled to the front, and made to touch the lynching rope, so they’d be implicated in the oath of silence.¹⁰⁴ Robert Wells, who was then a railroad warden, and would later be Sheriff of Alachua County, set the nooses. Myrtle describes the action of the lynching as: “They took [two men] and put a man [each] on two horses – one to go one way and one to go the other,”¹⁰⁵ indicating that **Andrew McHenry** and **Bert Dennis** were hung simultaneously, then **Mary Dennis** and **Stella Young** hung afterwards.

In the lexicon of the day, it was a clean lynchings, without obvious mutilation; no shooting of the corpses after. Frank Dudley bragged that “it was a fine job that was done – as good as a legal lynching, with the necks broke real clean.”¹⁰⁶ It was also cold-blooded, premeditated murder, made

104 *ibid*

105 Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

106 Ron Sachs, Sunday Magazine, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

the more shameful when you consider that sisters were made to watch their brothers being murdered, before they were murdered themselves.

It was the *definition* of terror.

The horror of the night was not finished when the victims were hung. Two guards were posted to prevent the corpses from being cut down, in a ruthless sign of vengeance and contempt.¹⁰⁷ William Barry, Senior, who was a 20-year-old witness, says the bodies were discovered at first light, hanging from the limbs of the same live oak, visible from the Gainesville Road. (33)

The stringer reporters on hand were quick to pen bold-face headlines that appeared in newspapers across the country: **ALL THE COUNTRY UP IN ARMS**¹⁰⁸, and **RACE WAR OPENS AT NEWBERRY WOMEN LYNCHED**¹⁰⁹, **FIVE BLACKS HANGED TO OAK TREE BY MOB OF**

107 Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

108 The Ocala Evening Star, August 19, 1916

109 The Palm Beach Post, August 20, 1916

TWO HUNDRED AT NEWBERRY¹¹⁰ The explosive headlines drew thousands of curious spectators to the picnic grounds to view the mob's handiwork. The crowd, swelled by the hundreds of men who'd come to the area to join the search for Boisy Long, included women and a not a few children. They didn't hurry by for a quick glimpse but milled around the old picnic grounds all day. Dora Jones, who was a small child, was close enough to the corpses that she and other children were able to push them back and forth in play, like swings on a playground.¹¹¹

The bodies were left to hang till mid-afternoon, when they were cut down, possibly to coincide with the return by train of the family, friends, and colleagues who had attended Wynne's funeral in Quitman. Reporters were still in attendance, and at some point in the afternoon, photographs were taken around the piled corpses, boldly and unashamed, with no faces masked; no need for deception.

110 *Tampa Bay Times*, August 20, 1916

111 Unnamed source

Mob photographs were a common feature in spectacle lynchings. There could be no bragging rights if there was no photograph of the trophy. There are two such photos thought to be taken at the Newberry lynching¹¹², one a broad shot of thirty-five men and boys posing around the strewn bodies of five black corpses. **Stella Young**, or possibly one of the Dennis sisters, is visible in the center of the corpses, her face upward, her eyes open, her left hand tied before her. The faces of the other victims aren't visible; just their bodies, and bare feet, strewn in the dirt, the ropes still encircling their wrists.

112 The photographs were unearthed by Dr. Marvin Dunn, who found them in the basement of the Jacksonville Public Library. Senior rangers at Dudley Farm have verified the identity of three of the Dudley sons. (*Florida Though Black Eyes*, Marvin Dunn)

For many years, the photographs, which have Lake City stamped on the back of the original print, were thought to be taken at a mass lynching there in 1911. However, the Lake City lynching victims were riddled with bullets when they were cut down, to the point of mutilation. The lynching victims in the photograph Marvin Dunn recovered are not mutilated, but fit the criteria of the lynching scene as remembered by first-hand witnesses. As Patricia Hilliard-Nunn has noted, if this scene was not taken at Newberry, it is hard evidence that the Dudley sons, and William Barry, Senior, were present at another mass lynching before 1910 and 1916.

Several of the men in the group photograph have been identified.

William Barry, Senior stands in the front row in a white shirt and pork pie hat. Ben and Fannie Dudley's four sons are also in the front row, right of center. Ralph stands with his hands together, wearing an oversized suit and straw boater. Frank Dudley is to his right, a young teen in a porkpie hat, still in knee pants. Next to him is Norman, in a suit, his arms crossed on his chest, his hat aslant. Harvey Dudley stands in profile, in a dark derby hat that is pushed back on his head, dressed in a dark suit and tie. His hands are on his hips as he stares at the bodies.



Courtesy of the collection of Marvin Dunn

Every man in the photograph is dressed in their Sunday best, with straw boater hats, suits and watch chains. The faces of the Dudley brothers seem disoriented and aggrieved, as would be expected of young men who have lost their favorite uncle, and now are posed in front of the decomposing corpses of neighbors they'd known their entire lives.

More disconcerting are the faces of the men in the middle of the photograph, who are dressed in snowy white shirtfronts and suits, who

stare into the camera with near-smiles, of shameless satisfaction. The usual excuse for the lynching of 1916 – one perpetuated by both Frank and Myrtle Dudley – is that the friends of George Wynne were so grief-crazed by his death that they lashed out in their pain, and committed crimes of passion. These men do not look crazed by grief.

If anything, they look defiant, staring into the eye of history without insight and without pity; the corpses of a murdered family sprawled at their feet.

Chapter Eight: The Capture of Boisy Long

The capture of Boisy Long on Sunday evening, August 20, 1916, was presented in the press as a cut and dried moment of extreme good luck on behalf of the Alachua County Sheriff's department. According to the *Ocala Evening Star*, Long randomly approached an "old colored preacher" named Squire Long at his home nine miles northeast of Newberry, and asked for food.¹¹³

Squire Long recognized the wounded man as Boisy Long and he and his 23-year-old son, Jackson Long, took him prisoner. They turned him over to Sheriff Ramsey the next morning, to the relief and approbation of all. "The action of the old negro, Squire Long, is [sic] bringing the murderer to the Gainesville jail was very unusual, very sensible, and can't be too highly commended."¹¹⁴

The account made for a tidy ending and a compelling bit of storytelling. Squire Long's portrayal as a "wise old colored preacher"

¹¹³ The Ocala Evening Star, August 21, 1916

¹¹⁴ *ibid*

reduced his part in Boisy Long's arrest to recognizable elements for the digestion of white readers: the story of the negro desperado being apprehended, against all expectation, by a wise old member of his own tribe. According to the rules of blood-law, such a transaction would return harmony to the region: a member of the offending tribe offering up the life of the offender.

That was possibly the underlying storyline that law enforcement hoped to convey, post-lynching, though many of the details were not only untrue, but deliberately so. In truth, Squire Long was not an elderly old preacher, but younger by three years than Deputy Wynne. Boisy Long's appearance at his door was not random, nor were they strangers. Squire Long's mother, Flora Long (1840) owned land in Jonesville in 1900, and lived in the same neighborhood as the Dudley's and the Dennis/Long/McHenry families, separated by a few houses.

The Crisis reported that Squire Long was, in fact, Boisy Long's uncle, a relationship that was denied as a matter of survival.¹¹⁵ The connection

¹¹⁵ *The Crisis*, October 1916

better explains why Boisy Long would have sought him out for assistance, as Squire Long was a successful farmer who owned 100 acres, and was, from all appearances, that figure well-known in every generation of Southern life: the uncle who moved away from modest beginnings and had done well for himself.

Why Squire Long turned Boisy Long in to Sheriff Ramsey is less clear, though intimidation was surely part of the exchange. Even after the bodies were cut down on Saturday afternoon, the mob was still armed and dangerous, and according to a few sources, quelling a brewing race war in downtown Newberry. The fear of a race war was so pervasive in the South that it amounted to phobia, dated back to antebellum times, when whites were hugely outnumbered by slaves in plantation districts such as Dudley. There was a constant fear of a slave revolt, where the tables were turned and white people were on the receiving end of the brutality.

The fear of such a rebellion was well known in Alachua County. It had compelled the organization of the Gainesville Minutemen in 1859, a militia company raised expressly to quell slave rebellions after John

Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. The specter of a similar uprising – not of slaves, but by the black miners of the West End – sparked a panic in white Newberry on Saturday night, when “several hundred” black miners gathered in the downtown, not in the northeast where they were allowed, but in the area of the bank, opera house and new homes of the white professionals. *The Atlanta Constitution* reported: “When news of the lynching here reached the phosphate mines today a large number of Negroes gathered in town and for a time it was feared a race war would result. White men seized all available arms and ammunition, and after a short time, the Negroes dispersed.”¹¹⁶

The white men who “seized the arms” included not just the deputies, but the woods riders and railroad wardens who'd been in town since Friday, who had high caliber pistols and the arms and ammunition to put down an insurrection. The black miners were at a distinct disadvantage as they weren't legally allowed to own firearms under the Black Code. A few might have managed to lay hands on a few weapons – birdshot in

¹¹⁶ *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 20, 1916

shotguns, picks, and a few secreted pistols, but they were poorly armed, if at all.

Whether this crowd of black miners posed a serious threat of race war is not known, as this footnote of resistance does not appear in the local newspapers, but as a postscript in an out-of-state paper. Myrtle Dudley certainly thought it a possibility. She said of the weekend: "I do not ever want to live through anything like this community was for about ten days. At sundown, every door on every house was shut just as tight as they could shut them. They were afraid that the niggers were going to team together and get them."¹¹⁷

She also speculated that there were more black casualties after the lynching than were ever reported. "I think there were twenty-five or thirty nigras killed out here in the woods. And not a white man in among them... That was pure nigra."¹¹⁸

117 Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

118 *ibid*

Whether this high number is body-count bragging (Myrtle was prone) or evidence of other clashes on Saturday night and Sunday as the white men put down a rebellion, is not known.

Boisy Long showed up at Squire Long's door while the racial confrontation was happening in downtown Newberry, though given the twelve-mile distance, he might not have known the miners had risen to object. Squire Long did know, unequivocally, that if he was suspected of assisting Boisy Long in any way, it would have meant death, not only for him, but possibly his entire family – his wife, Mamie, and five children. *The Crisis* asserted that Squire Long did not voluntarily hand Boisy Long over, but had been visited by the mob and terrorized before Long showed up at his door.¹¹⁹

It's also possible that Long's surrender was a negotiated arrangement between Squire Long and Sheriff Ramsey. Both of them owned farms in Arredondo and they almost certainly knew each other. Squire Long might have asked for safe passage for Boisy Long if he turned him in, to escape

119 *The Crisis*, October 1916

the guarantee of a grisly death if the mob caught him before the Sheriff did; no assurance of a clean lynching, but one of mutilation and torture – such as Sheriff Ramsey had hinted might happen, that he “feared for the life of the black if he fell into the hands of the searchers.”¹²⁰

The finer details of the arrest are yet unknown. What *is* known is that on the morning of August 20, Squire and Jackson Long delivered Boisy Long to Sheriff P. G. Ramsey in Gainesville. There does seem to be a scent of negotiation in the deal, as Long’s treatment thereafter was strikingly better, which might have been a condition of his arrest. Sheriff Ramsey, who was reportedly present (and possibly the shooter) of Jim Dennis, was suddenly committed to the absolute safety of the man he had so assiduously pursued.

Ramsey feared the mob would “most surely” take Boisy Long if he were kept in the Gainesville jail, and upon his arrest, spirited Long, Mills Dennis and another prisoner, Will Turner, to a secret location for safe keeping, later identified as the Jacksonville jail. They were accompanied by

¹²⁰ *The Tampa Tribune*, August 19, 1916

several deputies and County Solicitor William Long, to the jail of W. H. Dowling.¹²¹

The extreme security used in the transfer marks a change in the tone of the weekend; when the fury of blood-revenge was overtaken by the rule of law. The burning of the black community, which follows similar lynchings in Rosewood and Perry, did not happen in Jonesville, nor were there any further murders (at least known to the present record.) Sheriff Ramsey was able to regain control of his county in a way that Sheriff Elias Walker could not, five years later in Rosewood. How he regained that power – by violence or by parley - is not known, but was almost certainly was connected to the surrender of Boisy Long.

¹²¹ *The Miami News*, August 23, 1916

Chapter Nine: This Uncivilized and Unfavorable Business

With the capture of Boisy Long, the escalating violence of the weekend peaked and began a precipitous decline. The bodies of **Gilbert** and **Mary Dennis, Stella Young, Andrew McHenry** and **Joshua Baskins** were released to their families, and at least three of them, possibly all, buried in the shaded cemetery behind Pleasant Plain Methodist Church, a mile or so northeast of the Dudley homestead.

The reversal in attitude was significant. Newspapers that howled outrage on Friday seem chastised and reasonable on Monday, with a few perverse attempts at humor to leaven the horror of the weekend, such as the quip in *The Tampa Tribune* on August 22: "Those Newberry fellows are not pikers. They lynch them in bunches of five."

More grievous, and typical of the day, was the tongue-in-cheek account of a grand jury finding that appeared in the *Ocala Evening Star* that poked grotesque fun at the manner of the victims' deaths, reporting on the "remarkable verdict" the coroner's jury found: "The jury seems to have investigated seven deaths. One negro man, according to the reported

coroner's verdict, came to his death by running into a barbed wire fence and cutting himself to death. Another man came to his death by smashing his head against a telephone post. Two women fell out of a tree and choked to death. Three men, who had climbed into the tree to rescue the women, fell out and broke their necks."¹²²

These glib dismissals weren't universal, as the Newberry lynchings were crimes of passion and crimes of overkill, even by pioneer standards of blood-revenge. The men of the mob and their friends in power could explain and excuse, and even make joking fun of the whole weekend, but the lynching of a family, including two women, while not unknown, was a serious matter, not easily explained away. *The Stark Telegraph* didn't make light of the lynching, but offered a thoughtful rebuke: "We have had too much of this uncivilized and unfavorable business in Florida recently. It is

¹²² *Ocala Evening Star*, August 19, 1916

This callous inside joke probably refers to the death of Bert Dennis, who might have run into barbed wire while trying to escape the mob, and Jim Dennis, whose head wound was said to have blown into a nearby post.

disturbing to us at home and harmful abroad. Let's get back to enlightenment and progress."¹²³

The combination of shame, and fear of a race riot, and possibly a promise by Sheriff Ramsey to try Long according to by-the-book legal standards, took the matter out of the rules of blood revenge and put it firmly in the hands of the court in Gainesville. A special term was called for September 6, three weeks after the bodies were cut down, reining in the chaos, and slapping on a coat of respectability; giving the whole weekend a reassuring air of enlightenment and progress.

The grand jury duly studied the evidence, and made a grave and thoughtful statement, "deploring the acts of violence that have recently been committed in our county." They assured the court that they had diligently investigated "with a view of ascertaining the guilty parties" but were unable to affix guilt. They went on to recommend that people look to

¹²³ *The Stark Telegraph*, August 23, 1916

the authorities to solve and punish crime, and “refrain from such acts of violence as casts a reflection upon this, our county.”¹²⁴

The report offered little solace to the families of the victims, but only confirmed what they suspected would happen: nothing. The machinery of law and order were weak weapons when faced with tribal loyalty. The dramatic wording of the finding, along with the lack of substance, made it so empty that it almost reads as parody, except for the last lines, that seem more sincerely voiced: a reminder that the rest of Alachua County did not want to be stuck with the lawless reputation that threatened any semblance of an economic rebound on the West End.

The grand jury investigation into the death of George Wynne had far less difficulty returning a murder indictment against Boisy Long. On

¹²⁴ *Forgotten Heroes: Police Officers Killed in Early Florida, 1840-1925*, William Wilbanks, 1998

As noted previously, the quotes from the trial transcript were taken from William Wilbank’s *Fallen Heroes*. Mr. Wilbanks was able to find a copy of the trial transcript in 1996, but a records request to the Alachua County Court in 2019 did not yield such a document, though a handwritten account of the Special Session of the grand jury was found. Local researchers have mentioned that the original documents related to the Newberry Six have disappeared from public view. The trial manuscript seems to be one of them.

September 5, a special term of court was called, before Judge Wills. Robert E. Davis was appointed Long's attorney, with A.V. Long the prosecuting attorney.¹²⁵

The trial was held on September 7 at the courthouse in Gainesville in front of twelve white jurors. Grady Blount took the stand to testify about the shooting in Jonesville less than three weeks before, as did Lem Harris, and Tom Wynne, who testified that his brother had regained consciousness on the train ride to Jacksonville on Friday morning, long enough to tell him: "Tom, I am going to die. Boisy Long has shot me."¹²⁶ His testimony was (apparently) not challenged, but was contrary to the memories of Katie Bea Cooke, whose Uncle Henry drove George Wynne to the train, and reported that he lost consciousness on the Gainesville Highway, and never regained it.

A Jacksonville doctor testified about Wynne's injuries, and Boisy Long took the stand to offer his own account of the night. He described a scenario almost identical to the State's case, except that in his telling, at that

125 *ibid*

126 *ibid*

tense moment of arrest, when he was sitting on the bed, and reached for his shirt, Deputy Wynne pulled first.

The entire trial took less than two and a half hours. The lawyers made their cases, the witnesses testified, and the jury¹²⁷ deliberated for seven minutes before they found Boisy Long guilty in the standard language

of the day: "Thursday September 7th 1916. And thereafter on the same day returned into court and rendered the following verdict to wit: We the Jury find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree so say we all."¹²⁸

Governor Trammell signed the warrant for Long's execution on October 13, with the execution date set for Friday, October 27. There were no delays or challenges to his sentence, and Long was hung on the yard of the Alachua County jail by Sheriff P. G. Ramsey, when hangings were still open to the public. It is likely that members of the Newberry mob put on

127 The jurors were: F. W. Tyson, C. C. Sherouse, H. C. Forsyth, G. A. Wiggins (foreman), L. A. Sherouse, E. A. Flowers, B. W. Waits, W. F. Beckham, F. O. Parker, J. W. Sherouse, C. F. Morrison, and R. M. Chamberlin. (6)

128 Alachua County Court Records, September 7, 1916

their suits and boaters and took the train into Gainesville that day to attend Boisy Long's execution with the same satisfaction that they'd presided over the murder of his family.

Chapter Ten: Looking to Relocate

The oath of silence taken by the mob could not entirely erase the memory of the weekend of August 18. There were too many witnesses, and too much publicity, including the reporter who was sent from *The Crisis*, writing under the initials M. A. H, whose pen fairly shook with contempt when they wrote about the lynchings in the October 1916 edition. The gracious, aspiring Newberry of salad suppers and musicales is described with painful honesty as “a desolate place of shanties and small houses and has a reputation for lawlessness. There is not one good building in the place and many of the houses are vacant. The sun beats down on the roofs and there is almost no shade.”¹²⁹

An opinion piece that ran in the same edition, possibly penned by W. E. B. Dubois himself, did not spare the feelings of the black communities of Newberry and Jonesville, who, he deemed, “acted like a set of cowardly sheep. Without resistance they let a white mob whom they outnumbered two to one, torture, harry and murder their women, shoot down innocent

¹²⁹ *The Crisis*, October, 1916

men entirely unconnected with the alleged crime, and finally to cap the climax, they caught and surrendered the wretched man whose attempted arrest caused the difficulty.”¹³⁰ The author goes on to say that they forfeited the sympathy of civilized folk, and that the black community should have “fought in self-defense to the last ditch if they had killed every white man in the county and themselves been killed,” and recommended that “The man who surrendered to a lynching mob the victim of the sheriff ought himself to been locked up.”¹³¹

The anguished rage of *The Crisis* editorial is understandable, but is misdirected concerning the black community of the West End, which *did* rise up to challenge the lynching. The fate of that crowd of black miners is unknown, but likely dispersed because they lacked fire power to take on the combined arms of the Sheriff’s department, Gainesville constables, the wood riders from the lumber yards, and the wardens of the Atlantic Coastal Railroad. The white mob leaders’ ability to hold the train for George Wynne in Waldo, and to bring Bob Wells to town on a day’s notice

130 *ibid*

131 *ibid*

indicates that they had the connections and the resources to pull in reinforcements from across the state.

The gathering of the miners in downtown Newberry was hardly mentioned in the newspapers, though the stinging rebuke by the voice of the militant New Negro of the North remains. Published nationwide in October of 1916 to a readership of nearly 100,000, the article in *The Crisis*, though spot-on and honest, was surely salt in the wounds of the black community in Jonesville, which was still grieving the loss of three well-loved families, and raising their orphaned toddlers and children. They were already split over the circumstances of Boisy Long's arrest, and saw betrayal on one side; furious condemnation on the other.

Though white Newberry would later seem a solid-south of support for the lynching, there were voices of dissent, even in 1916, when such talk might be construed as "asking for a killin." A white preacher, who Frank Dudley alludes to, but does not name, was threatened into silence after condemning the lynching. A white Western Union Telegraph line man L.

A. Madden was “requested by citizens to leave town” by people “not prepared to listen to his intemperate utterances.”¹³²

Other men, who were close to the action, left soon after, without explanation, including one of the town physicians, and two county deputies. Social scenes in local newspapers report other businessmen from Newberry arriving in Ocala and Tampa the week after the lynching “looking to relocate.”

Though these “relocations” were couched in the polite language of the day, there is no doubt that Newberry lost population, business and prestige for its part in the lynching. To the families who had built the nice homes in the downtown, who worked in professions already strained by the economic downturn, the lynching of women was the last straw; an incomprehensibly barbaric act that confirmed their fears about the West End as a rough and lawless place.

132 *The Ocala Evening Star*, August 22, 1916

Madden’s criticism of Deputy Wynne was not related to the lynching, per se, but stemmed from his previous arrest by Wynne.

The outward movement of population was accelerated in April when America finally entered the European War, and young men twenty-one to thirty-one were registered to serve. Lem Harris, who had recovered from his wounds, was yet a young father, and a sympathetic figure to county leaders. He was appointed to work for selective service, and registered Newberry men for the draft. You'll see his signature scrawled on many a Newberry draft card from the area, along with the names, occupations, hair color and built of just about every young man in the Newberry district.

World War I dug deeply into the farms of the West End, depriving them of essential labor, including the sons who would have traditionally taken over family farms on their father's death. Three of the Dudley brothers served, with Norman badly wounded in the trenches, left with significant post-traumatic-stress. Frank was the only son who did not serve, and he was readying himself to report to service when the war ended.¹³³

¹³³ *Dudley Farm, a History of Florida Farm Life* Ben Pinkard

The bitter racial divide in the rural communities around the Big Bend wasn't was dissipated by the war, though practice of lynching was (finally) condemned by President Woodrow Wilson, in a speech made in July 1918, that drew a firm line: "I say plainly that every American who takes part in the action of a mob or gives it any sort of countenance is no true son of this great democracy, but its betrayer."¹³⁴

His strong words, long overdue, were largely ignored in the rural counties of North Florida, and more violence flared when black soldiers returned home with combat experience and the expectation of better treatment by the county they'd served. In 1920, there were race riots in **Oconee** after black men tried to vote, where two white men and five black men were killed, and most of the black section of town burned down.

In 1922, two counties away in Perry (connected to Newberry by a daily train), a black man named Charles Wright was accused of the rape and murder of a white school teacher. The local public schools, including

¹³⁴ *The Miami News*, July 26, 1918

small children, were let out to watch as he was burned at the stake.

Afterwards, two more black men were killed, and large sections of the black community burned.

Even closer to home, next door in Levy County, was the burning of Rosewood in 1921, after a white woman accused a black man of assault, triggering a week of violence, where at least eight people were killed; two white and six black. Like Perry, Rosewood had many Newberry connections, and it is likely that some of the outsiders who flooded into the woods of Rosewood that cold first week of January were veterans of the mob violence in Newberry five years before. Sheriff Walker did not gain control of the situation for days, and in the end, called in Sheriff P.G. Ramsey for assistance in quelling the violence. Ramsey served as President of the Florida Sheriff's Association after the Newberry lynchings in 1919, and may have been seen as an expert, or at least a man experienced in controlling the flames of mob destruction.

The continued eruptions of mob violence caused black labor, which had been moving off the farm and into the city, to quit the South

completely, taking the bonuses offered by the booming industries of the North. The loss of labor in rural Florida was so massive that even old race-baiters like Sidney J. Catts found themselves backpedaling on their racist rhetoric. Catts, who supported vigilante justice as a matter of honor, began to speak of harmony among the races, though his about-face was too little, too late, in the flat woods of the Big Bend.

The lawlessness was too capricious and too expensive. It was bad for business, and when the sawmill in Sumner burned, the Cummer brothers moved their entire operations in Rosewood and Newberry to Lacoochee, a custom-built company town in Pasco County. Lewis Abraham, whose father owned a store in Newberry that he moved to Lacoochee in 1923, boasted that black and white workers did not bring the racial violence of the Big Bend with them to Lacoochee. They lived in segregated quarters, but black and white workers worked side by side with “no animosity and there was no problem.”¹³⁵

135 Lewis Abraham (1925-2004) Interview by Dr. Marc Yacht, part of CARES project.

The loss of the mines, overcut of the lumber, and stark, racial violence created a deficiency of jobs, population and reputation, from which the town of Newberry would not recover. The soaring aspirations of Newberry the Boomtown, with trains, access to international money, and steady public improvement was soon nothing more than a memory. Trains still ran through the downtown, but there was no longer a passenger stop, or drummers to fill the local boarding house that closed, and eventually burned.

Tourists who passed through town on highway 41 might stop to buy gas and have a bite to eat, but found no reason to stay. The few professional jobs in town were filled with the sons of a handful of white families, related by blood, church and oath, who did not leave Newberry, but steadily bought up the cheap farmland. These farmers did not require the offices that the departed professional class had built, and left downtown Newberry a husk of its former self. The bank, light plant, and the brick-fronted downtown remained, but the high-ceilinged homes of the

white professionals suffered a Faulknerian decline, many lost to neglect or fire; the remaining blocks falling to disrepair.

The spreading limbs of the oak grove on the east end of town, once a pleasant shaded field for picnics and political speeches, became a dump with an unpleasant title: lynch hammock. In the travel guide published by the WPA in 1934, Newberry is mentioned as a melon-shipping district, nothing more.

The Community of Dudley suffered a similar decline, their great fortune in farming undercut by the the loss of their sons to war, and the boil weevil infestation that ruined local cotton farming. Ben Dudley died in October of 1918, just weeks after his oldest son, Harvey, shipped out overseas. Fannie Dudley survived him by almost twenty years, living at the farm at Dudley, cared for by her daughters, four of whom never married, but lived till their deaths at the family homestead.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ *Dudley Farm, a History of Florida Farm Life* Ben Pinkard

Though all of the Dudley sons were skilled farmers, only Ralph stayed to farm the family land, a quiet man who died a bachelor in 1967, and is buried with his family at Jonesville Baptist cemetery. Myrtle and three of her sisters, Edna, Myrtle, Winnie and Laura, worked with Ralph to keep the farm afloat with the help of hired black laborers, who required higher wages after the war. When Myrtle was asked if they had trouble keeping the farm running in the Depression, she answered with sour honesty: "No. We had trouble keeping nigras wanting to work for a loaf of bread."¹³⁷

The reluctance of black laborers to work at Dudley for low wages, or as tenants, had a solid economic impact on the farm's prosperity. Without them, the Community of Dudley could not, and did not expand, but slowly lost parcels, sold for cash, till the farm was no longer a plantation in any sense of the word, but just a farm. A struggling family farm, on the wrong end of the county, its show-piece of a main house not described in the

137 Myrtle Dudley, interviewed by Lisa Heard Date: February 25, 1992
Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, UF

memory of a younger kinsman as a “plantation house” but less poetically, and more accurately, as a *haunted* one.¹³⁸

Jonesville fared even worse, as it was unincorporated, and completely displaced when Highway 26 did not follow the path of the old Gainesville Highway, but was built slightly south of it. The well-known crossroads at the Community of Dudley was suddenly not a crossroads at all, but a weed-grown private drive. The pond that welcomed cattle drivers at the turn of the century was depleted by agricultural pumping; soon a dry hole easily mistaken for one of the many abandoned phosphate mines that pitted the West End.

When Cummer moved to Pasco County, their commissary building was rolled on logs to the the corner of Highway 26, and Farnsworth Road, making it the new Jonesville Crossroads. The commissary became a feed store (later an antique mall) and sat across the street from the Farnsworth gas station, that was the last gas station for ten miles, called “ten-mile past grocery store” due to its location ten miles west of Gainesville. For many

¹³⁸ *Dudley Farm, a History of Florida Farm Life* Ben Pinkard

years, the crossroads at Jonesville and a handful of scattered cemeteries and churches were the only landmarks left of the antebellum community of Jonesville.

Dudley was still there, a quarter mile off the main road, but it had lost prominence. After Ralph Dudley died, his sisters lived there, out of sight and out of mind till 1977, when a young journalist named Ron Sachs tracked down the last of the eye-witnesses of the nearly forgotten lynching, and penned a remarkable piece of long-form journalism that appeared in the *Sunday Magazine*, a magazine insert in the *Gainesville Sun*, on November 7, 1977. Sachs, who would have an award-winning career in investigative journalism, interviewed 77-year-old Frank Dudley, who was near the end of his life, and spoke with biting conviction about the lynchings, which he defended as “100% right.”

He insisted the accused were indeed thieves, the women and men both, and were “in for a killin to end their roughish ways.”¹³⁹ Dudley offered commentary of the weekend in the tone of an expert witness,

¹³⁹ Ron Sachs, *Sunday Magazine*, *Gainesville Sun*, November 7, 1977

recounting the shooting of Jim Dennis, and insisting the Newberry jail was not the holding area for the accused. He offered his account as the final word on the subject, and refused to name names. "There might still be some living, but I ain't gonna say so. In another five years or so, there probably won't be anyone left to tell the story firsthand."¹⁴⁰

He seemed sure the oath of silence would be maintained and assured Sachs: "No one outside here is ever gonna find out. No one is ever going to know the 100 percent truth."¹⁴¹

Ron Sachs' article must have shaken the windows in Newberry when it arrived on their doorstep, as Frank Dudley wasn't the only local who spoke on the record. William Barry, Senior, whose family owned the Suwanee Pharmacy where Lem Harris worked, also spoke with Sachs. Barry tap-danced around his exact role in the lynching and claimed not to know the names of the actual murderers, which is possible, in the sense that he didn't see them tie the rope. He does appear to be in the mob

140 *ibid*

141 *ibid*

photograph – the slight young man in the center row, wearing a porkpie hat. It is possible that he only participated as he describes to Sachs, as a curious young man following the commotion, and coming upon the bodies hung on a single oak tree on the morning of August 19.

Barry, who had served on the Alachua County School Board, and was a leading light in farming and education in the area, used the same racial phrasing as Frank Dudley did, which makes for jarring reading. He also did that thing no one in white Newberry had yet attempted: not only condemned the lynching, but attempted to explain the mindset of the day, that had allowed such a thing to happen: “I’m sure more white citizens would agree now that back then, many white people believed that a nigger didn’t have a soul. They were mistreated – it was a terrible thing. I don’t know who done it, but it was wrong. As far as the community and history go, that was probably our worst day.”¹⁴²

Sachs also spoke to a local black man named R. Henry, the son of a black Jonesville farmer who was eleven-years-old in 1916. Henry was not a

142 *ibid*

witness to the lynching, but his father, Richard Henry, was one of the curious who went down to the hammock on Saturday and saw the strung-up bodies. Henry, who was 72, was one of the few, if only, living witnesses who went on the record to refute the claims that the Dennis family were thieves. "The white folks said all those colored folks was thieves, but it wasn't so. My daddy said it wasn't so."¹⁴³

Sachs also interviewed Murray Randolph, the youngest child of Stella Young and Boisy Long, who was a toddler in 1916. In keeping with the long-habit of the black community in Jonesville, Randolph was terse in discussing the lynching with an outsider. He said he "grew up hearing all the stories but I don't know any truth except both my parents died. I never really knew them." He also denied being angry about it. "Years ago I might have been mad about it. I don't know who to hold responsible, so I don't. What was done is done."¹⁴⁴

143 *ibid*

144 *ibid*

Chapter Eleven: Awakenings

Murray Randolph's stoic acceptance of his parents' deaths was the last word on the Newberry lynching for a very long time. County historians knew of the event and made notations of the lynching victims' names, which were often confused and misspelled, but included in the historic record, if anyone cared to look. The central role the Dudley family played in the lynching was just another footnote, as the Dudley's were no longer the area's premier planters.

Their family farm might have been torn down and lost to memory, if not for a local ag agent named Buck Mitchell, who lived and worked in the Newberry area in the early 1980's. One of his jobs was testing cattle for brucellosis, and one of the herds he tested was kept in the fields of a ramshackle, old-timey farm that was managed with tart williness by a Cracker matriarch in her 80's, named Myrtle Dudley.

Myrtle did not suffer fools gladly, and was no friend of the state. She had lived her entire life at the farm that her grandfather, Captain Dudley, had homesteaded before the Civil War. She was infirm, and had let the

homestead grow up around her, living mostly in the back side of the listing old house where she had been born. Like all farms, something was always in need of repair, and Myrtle was not above asking for free labor from the “state man.” Mitchell was willing to twist a few bolts and reset cattle troughs, and in time, a friendship sprang up between them. Mitchell was intrigued by the homestead at Dudley, where time seemed to have stood still, as if under a conjurer’s spell. The gable of the dark, tin-roofed house peeked above a swept yard full of wild-running old roses, with a side and back yards marking a true Florida tangle of citrus trees, banana trees, and fat old cypress that marked the once-significant crossroads.

There was history there, overgrown and swallowed, but certainly not forgotten by Miss Myrtle, who liked to sit on her front porch in the cool of the evening and watch the sun set on the old Gainesville Road. She was glad of the company and told Buck Mitchell many charming (and alarming) stories of the Dudley’s long stewardship of the land. She spoke often of her mother, Fannie Dudley, who was a powerful force in all her children’s lives, and mentioned that Fannie had wanted to leave the hard-

worked homestead to someone who would preserve it, and take care in remembering its past.

Mitchell encouraged her to do so, and in 1982, Myrtle donated the Dudley homestead and 24 acres of the farm to the State of Florida, along with furnishings, out-buildings, and papers. The gift was particularly fruitful as Myrtle continued to live at the homestead while the renovations were underway, offering a first-hand witness to the last century. In 1991, she won the Florida Folk Heritage Award in recognition of her contributions to the State.



Myrtle Dudley, 1992 Courtesy *Florida Memory Project*

Myrtle won the award despite the fact that she never repented of her family's involvement in the Newberry lynching, and lived her life an avowed racist. On one occasion, she was hosting a lunch for the park rangers who were working on the restoration of the homestead. When she learned one of the workers was black, she refused to let him inside her house to eat lunch. In solidarity, all of the rangers ate outside.¹⁴⁵

The State of Florida allowed Myrtle such liberties till her death in 1996, perhaps for the greater good of saving the farm. Certainly the state rangers who worked with Myrtle Dudley understood her racial views, and thanks to Frank Dudley's interview in 1977, also knew the close association between the family and the lynchings, which warranted an entire chapter in the official biography of the Dudley family that the State produced:

Dudley Farm, a History of Florida Farm Life.

145 Unnamed source

The account of the lynching in the official biography was factual, but far short of the information that was well-known by the time it was published. Much was made of black neighbors seeking the protection of the Dudley family, and of them obligating, giving the reader a very poor understanding of the family's role in the lynching.

To the State's credit is Myrtle's oral history, taken by Lisa Heard and Sally Morrison on February 25, 1992. They encouraged Myrtle to speak freely, which she did, offering an authentic slice of Old Florida in her every breath: in her pride of family, distrust of outsiders, and in the absolute depth of her racism, which was not a fluke of record, but reflected commonly held beliefs of her day.

The restoration of the Community of Dudley and near-sanctification of the Dudley family in the park's literature and museum drew the attention of African-American historian and documentarian Dr. Patricia Hilliard-Nunn. A professor of African-American Studies at the University

of Florida, Hilliard-Nunn had begun documenting black history in Alachua County as a film maker.

When interviewing Alachua County natives, no matter where they lived, the 1916 lynching in Jonesville kept coming up in conversation; a community trauma that was clearly not resolved.¹⁴⁶ Ninety years later, it was still an open wound, so wrapped in secrecy that Hilliard-Nunn had to patiently pick out the names and family connections with the same painstaking effort the miners once extracted phosphate in the old pits.

She found elderly descendants of the Dennis, Long, McHenry and Young families who were first-source witnesses, but refused to go on the record to speak of the lynching for fear of their lives, eighty years later. In 2002, Hilliard-Nunn organized the first official memorial service for the Newberry Six, under the canopy of the remnant of the oak grove at the old picnic grounds. Fifty guests, including some descendants of the nearby Rosewood Massacre, came together to remember, breaking the oath of silence on the ground where it was made.

¹⁴⁶ Claudia Aiden, *Gainesville Sun*, September 4, 2005

In 2019, after a long collaboration with descendants of the Newberry Six, Hilliard-Nunn wrote the text for the Florida historic marker that was unveiled at Pleasant Plain Methodist Church, which lists the names of the Newberry Six, along with a brief history of the event.

(photo of marker)

The day the marker was dedicated the Mayor of Newberry, Jordan Marlowe, offered an official apology for the City's role in the lynching.

(copy of Jordan's apology)

Chapter Twelve: Eventual Endings

The Reverend William Young lost his wife Della only two years after the lynching, on October 18, 1918, in Newberry. She was fifty-one, and they had been married 23 years. Two years later, on the 1920 census, William Young can be found living in Gainesville on Thomas Street with his children, who are enrolled in school there.

When William Young died in 1933, he returned to Jonesville, to be buried next to his wife at Pleasant Plain.

Stella Young and **Boisy Long's** youngest child, Murray Randolph, was raised by his Aunt Julia, Jim Dennis' widow. He grew up around farming and tractors, and joined the army in World War II, as a mechanic. When his service was up, he returned to Newberry and worked at the John Deere dealership. He died in 1992 and is buried with his family at Pleasant Plain.

Randolph's Aunt Julia Dennis, who was left to retrieve her husband's body that bloody Friday morning, continued to live in the Jonesville area.

On the 1920 census, she is a 33-year-old widow, raising nine children – her own three, and seven who were orphaned by the lynching. When she died in 1974, Julia Dennis was buried with her husband at Pleasant Plain, with his brothers and sisters, and sister-in-law. Her children put a tombstone of some distinction on her grave, with a photograph of her that gazes out, firm and clear-eyed.

She and Jim Dennis' children have continued to defend their family homes and farms, not against racial violence, but gentrification. The once wild and lawless West End of Alachua County has been overtaken by affluent suburbia, as West Gainesville continues to march west. Some of the old phosphate pits are now surrounded by subdivisions with lush landscaping and wrought iron gates, and no mention of the convict labor that once sweated their banks.

In 2002, a developer bought property inside the boundaries of the historic black community in Jonesville, and proposed to close a historic road. In a rare public statement, the Dennis and Long families objected strenuously, Eunice Myers speaking for the family when she said: "We just

don't want that kind of stuff out here. We've been out here for a long time, and it's been our place, and we just want to be left alone."¹⁴⁷

Myers mentioned in an aside that people had been trying to run her family off the land since her grandmother, Julia Dennis, first moved here in the late 1800s. But the family remained, even after Dennis' husband was lynched by a white gang in 1918. "I've gotten some good offers, but I could never sell," Myers said.¹⁴⁸

Annie Dennis, **Bert Dennis'** widow, moved to Tarpon Springs, Florida, where she is living with her daughter on the 1930 census. She died in 1932.

Josh Baskins' wife and three daughters stayed in Jonesville for a few years after his murder. They appeared on the 1920 census as farm labor, and eventually moved to Broward County, where Ellen Baskins lived with a daughter till her death, her occupation listed as a laundress.

¹⁴⁷ Tim Lockette, *Gainesville Sun*, December 19, 2002

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*

Josh Baskins' brother continued to farm in Newberry till his death, and the family still has descendants in the area who attend memorials in his memory.

William Berry, Senior owned a pharmacy for many years in Newberry, and was active in every aspect of the community's life. He made his mark in Florida agriculture when he developed a cure for screw worms, which he manufactured in a small building in downtown Newberry. He and his son Billy were active in historic preservation. They donated many family photographs to the state, and can be viewed online at *The Florida Memory Project*.

Sheriff P. G. Ramsey was elected to three terms as sheriff, and served as President of the Florida Sheriff's Association. He died in 1925, in Gainesville.

Deputy Tom Mobley returned to his native Suwannee County shortly after the lynching. On his World War I draft card, signed the year after the lynching, he is not listed as a deputy by profession, but a farmer. He died in Live Oak in 1940.

Lem Harris and his family moved to Pinellas County in 1928, for economic reasons, as Newberry no longer had the population to support multiple pharmacists. Harris himself was not known to have ever discussed his shooting, though his son, late in his life, related a version of the story (that Harris had been shot by an escaping inmate.)

Grady Blount owned a gas station in Newberry for several years. He eventually moved to Gainesville, then Plant City, where he died in 1953.

Dr. Lester Weeks moved to Trenton in the late twenties, and practiced medicine there till his death in 1937.

Dr. Samuel Getzen, who was reported as ill in the days after the lynching¹⁴⁹ recovered and remained in Newberry, where he was a physician till his death in 1946.

Dr. Joseph Ruff moved to Clearwater immediately after the lynching, where he died in 1936.

Deputy George W. Livingston retired as a deputy shortly after the lynching, and returned to a career as a building contractor. He died in Newberry in 1934.

Deputy W. Bruton moved to Micanopy by 1930, where he continued to work as a sheriff's deputy, and farmed.

¹⁴⁹ *Tampa Tribune*, August 21, 1916

Deputy Charles Pinkoson became a City Marshall in Gainesville shortly after the lynching. He eventually served as the Sheriff of Alachua County, and the Gainesville Chief of Police.

A few of the landmarks from 1916 still survive in the Jonesville/Newberry area. The old jail in Newberry, where the lynching victims may (or may not) have been kept, is next to the historic light plant, on NW 260th Street in Newberry, where the City now stores equipment. The area is not open to the public, though inquiry by historians wanting to see the jail can be made of the City.

The actual live oak where the Newberry Six were lynched was once part of the grove that stood at the corner of Highway 26A (Newberry Lane) and 235 – just east of Hitchcock's, on the northwest side of the property. The tree was removed when Highway 235 was put through many years ago. The property is privately owned, but a remnant of the oak grove can be easily seen from either Highway 26 or 235.

A portion of the old Gainesville Road, that the men in automobiles drove up and down, searching for Boisy Long, can be seen in front of the Dudley homestead, where it crosses the old Jonesville Road. The crossroads is inside The Dudley Farm State Park, which is open year-round, and provides a window into life at a turn-of-the-century North Florida farm. Park rangers will discuss the Dudley family and their participation with the lynching of 1916 if requested.

According to the Park's map, Deputy George Wynne – Uncle George to the Dudley children – lived directly behind the homestead in an area that is now pasture, and not open to the public trails.

The cemetery at Jonesville Baptist Church holds most of the Dudley family, along with other names associated with the weekend. A few are buried in the old part of the Newberry Municipal Cemetery, on the high ground north of the flagpole.

Most, if not all, of the Newberry lynching victims are buried at the cemetery at Pleasant Plain Methodist Church, where the memorial stands.

Afterwards: Stumbling Upon a Story

The prediction that Frank Dudley made in 1977, that the members of the mob who were still alive would soon die, and take their secrets with them, was accurate, in that his generation did die fairly soon, and with a few exceptions, took their stories to the grave.

When I was an undergraduate at the University of Florida, I was an oral history student of the inimitable James Haskins, who once told me, a budding novelist, that writers didn't pursue stories; they stumbled upon them. I have found this to be true time and again, and stumbled upon the tragic story of the Newberry Six by the sheerest coincidence when I moved to downtown Newberry in 1987, a young mother with three small children, and a husband who worked nights.

I was a novelist-in-training and a student of history, with a degree from the University of Florida in English (and minor in Southern History) that seemed practically worthless at the time, but did lend me an appreciation of the small town life of Newberry, Florida, circa 1987. The house we bought was a tiny cracker vernacular built in 1910 in the days of

the phosphate boom. It had been renovated so thoroughly that the only original structures in the house were the brick fireplaces, the wood floors, and a ghost who used to walk the floors at night.

When I mentioned the ghost to an 82-year-old neighbor, she explained that the house had been there when she was a child, and back then, people had funerals at home, so maybe the ghost was someone who died there and couldn't quite shake free this mortal coil. The theology of the theory wasn't sound, but the explanation sufficed. In the South, we don't really believe in ghosts, except when we do.

Our neighborhood in the downtown was leafy, friendly, fading, and a little ramshackle, full of feral cats and interesting, half-dilapidated old houses as old, and older, than ours, that were so far gone that no one was interested in restoring them. Newberry was not wealthy, but dependent on Gainesville jobs that required commutes west every morning, along the two-lane highway 26 that was all fields and woods around the unincorporated town of Jonesville, then nothing more than country churches, a bar and a feed store.

Neither Newberry or Jonesville had much truck in the larger county. The money that could be had was in the hands of a few large-scale farmers and old families who'd been there forever, and could remember the glory days when the mines were open and the downtown full of saloons, shoot-outs and a women's dress store called Goodbreads, that had a sofa in the middle of the store where customers would recline like Roman Emperors while salesladies brought out dresses for their inspection. There was an opera house back, then, and a theatre, and a boarding house and hotels. The circus train would pass through town, in route to Sarasota, drawing the yearning interest of the barefoot country children, who dreamed of quitting farming and running away and joining them.

I heard these stories from my neighbors, who were all elderly women, some farm wives who'd moved to town when widowed; some daughters of the town's founders, who still owned stock in the old bank. They had money but were mighty cautious in spending it; drove aging Cadillacs, and had their hair done at the beauty shop a block away in the old brick front downtown. They were a delight to me in all their glorious

southern-woman ways, insisting I join the local Garden Club, where I was the youngest member by fifty years.

An especial friend was Miss Katie Bea Cooke, who had lived in the same house her entire life, and was a fount of history spanning an entire century. She lived across the street, and a few nights a week, sometimes every night, I'd go visit her. Though she was a charter member of First Baptist (also across the street), Katie Bea kept wine in her house (awful, K-mart wine) and wasn't above sipping Jim Beam (which she called Jim Bean) in a quiet way. When any of her many male relatives visited, she would disappear into her pantry under the stairs and emerge with a little glass in hand that she would hand to them without a word.

It made for good conversation, and she and I and whoever might stop in to join us talked about everything under the sun. Her cousins, Doc Berry, and his son Billy, would often join us; their take on small town life a novel in itself.

At UF, I wrote – or tried to write - a paper about the notorious lynching of Claude Neale that took place in 1934 in my hometown of

Marianna. I knew insider details about the Neale lynching, and had heard it talked about openly as a child. When I started asking questions for an official paper (at the University!) my sources dried up. I ended up writing a paper that included a mention of the lynching, but contained nothing new or extraordinary. I was a novelist, not an investigative journalist, and had none of the doggedness that was required to extract painful racial secrets in the South.

When we moved to Newberry, I knew, vaguely, that there had been a lynching there, way back, long before 1934, that included women, one of them pregnant. It was impossible not to know, as the last curve into town, where you'd give people directions to your house, was called Lynch Hammock. I don't remember registering any particular unease when using the term.

My family had lived in the South for twelve generations, and in Cracker Florida for the last hundred years. I was born in Marianna, and because of father's job, lived briefly in New Orleans, Wiggins, Mississippi; Hattiesburg Mississippi, and Ocala Florida before moving to Alachua

County. I had never lived in a town *without* an extensive lynching history, and though me and my neighbors talked about everything else under the sun, and even organized a historic committee to celebrate Newberry's Centennial, the Newberry lynching never came up, not once.

In fact, the history of black Newberry wasn't a huge part of the festivities, a choice that seemed mutual back then. Black Newberry was mostly centered in a northeast section of town, with their own churches, and their own life. Our children attended public school together, and I attended an integrated church in Gainesville, where black men and women were in leadership, including some who were natives of the West End of the County.

We were church friends of the sort that prayed with each other, ate with each other, and shared our toughest life challenges, and though we deplored racism in general, we never broached the subject of lynching. It was too complex; too painful. Once, at a night of prayer and testimony at our church, a well-meaning northern lady took the stage to apologize to the

black people in the church for racism. The children of the real South in the room did not react, either black or white, for a variety of reasons.

For one thing, the worst racist stuff of our history: it pretty much *had* to be ignored, if everyone was going to get along and go to church together and love one another as Christ loved the Church. There was a dead line of silence around the episodes of the worst shame that no one cared to publically approach, for reasons we really never examined. It might have been the elephant in the room, but it was so integrated into our history that it was an invisible elephant. We just draped a tablecloth over it and called it a table.

And it was *embarrassing*. We were all brothers and sisters in the Lord, and outside of that, brothers and sisters of the family of the South – a family with a secret sunk in shame. You didn't just stand up in church and *talk* about it, unless you *really* knew what you were talking about, and where Newberry was concerned, nobody really did. To stand and offer a two-sentence apology, even at church, in the heat of testimony-time at the

end of a service, seemed so tone-deaf and inadequate - that *apology* by an *outsider* would fix anything.

So we played nice and kept in our lanes and when white neighbors in Newberry mentioned the lynching at all, vaguely, and without personal reveal, I'd listen with as much interest as I did with any piece of local history. My response, like as not, would be to comment that *whatever* happened in Newberry could never be as bad as the Claude Neal lynching in Marianna, as if lynchings were a town sport, and *their* horrible horrors would never hold a candle to *our* horrible horrors.

It was a strange mindset.

Only on a few occasions, in moments of unguarded honesty, did anyone who knew – all white friends, all natives of Newberry – speak frankly of the lynchings, and share family history. Once, on a fishing trip at the mouth of the Suwannee, our friend Buddy Jeffcoat, who'd lived in Newberry his entire life, and was then a City Commissioner, recalled the lynching. His father was one of the teenagers who'd followed along in the

trees; who got caught and were made to touch the rope. Buddy didn't tell the story with huge gusto, or any shock at all; he didn't have to. He and his wife and I were all natives of Old Florida. We'd heard such stories our entire life.

Miss Essie Neagle, another neighbor who was related to the oldest families in the county, and made Easter baskets for neighbor children, was George Wynne's sister-in-law. She spoke a little of the lynchings and would have spoken a great deal more if Katie Bea hadn't put such a stink eye on her that she relented and moved on to other subjects. I wasn't living in Newberry in 1977, but am sure that when Doc Berry (William Berry, Senior) spoke to Ron Sachs in 1977, his breaking of the oath of silence caused enormous consternation in the family.

Doc's son, Billy, who was an artful, lovely man, refused to discuss it when approached by reporters, even as late as 2005. "It wasn't a community mishap," he said. "It was done by a few people."¹⁵⁰

150 Claudia Aiden, *Gainesville Sun*, September 4, 2005

Billy thought the event reflected poorly on his town, and said his parents, Doc and Ouida Berry, never discussed it with him, which sounds unbelievable, but was apparently the case with him, and with many other families. Katie Bea steered well clear of it, though we often talked about local history. On an evening in the mid-nineties, I must have mentioned the Neale lynching, as she asked me when it happened. When I told her 1934, she was surprised to hear lynchings were still being done that late in Florida history. I knew very little about the Newberry Six, and asked her when it happened.

“1916,” she said, then offered that her Uncle, Henry Tucker, had been there when they brought George Wynne to Newberry after he was shot. He’d owned a Model-T Ford and had driven it in that last-ditch try at getting Wynne to a surgeon in Jacksonville.

Katie Bea, who was six-years-old in 1916, and might very well have been one of the children who visited the hammock while the bodies were displayed, never spoke of that part of it. She just recalled, in a quiet voice, her Uncle’s account of driving Wynne down the bumpy lime rock

Gainesville Road, and how he regained consciousness long enough to remind her Uncle that the gates to the University of Florida would be locked.

She said those were his last words: “The gates will be locked,” before he lost consciousness and fell back on the seat.

I remember repeating them, “The gates will be locked,” and commenting that it was a hell of a last line; which she agreed.

And that was it.

Fifteen years later, after I’d published several novels and a cookbook/memoir, I decided to revisit the enigma of my family’s racial history, in *American Ghost*. Katie Bea was gone by then, as were all of the old Newberrians who’d served on the historic and beautification committees with me. I wrote the story in novel form because I believed that was the only way such stories would ever be told, and knocked it out as best I could, inserting a few snippets of real history that I thought strengthened the story, but kept it well off the holy ground of documented history. Telling that version was now impossible, I thought.

The first-source witnesses were gone and everyone was tired of talking about all the old horror stories, anyway. We had a black President and went to integrated churches and schools and in the words of Murray Randolph, what's done was done.

Except it wasn't.

While I was waiting that year-long wait that comes between finishing a novel and its launch, my daughter called me from work one day to tell me she'd come upon the strangest thing: a short video about the Newberry lynching. "There's a mob photo," she said.

I was amazed such a document existed, and followed the link she sent to a You-Tube video, which featured a black historian from Miami named Marvin Dunn, who did indeed have a photograph in the video of a mob. The glimpse in the video was brief, but it did make me curious. Mob photographs are a tricky proposition in the South. I've had people – honest, frank people, tell me that far more of them exist in private hands than are ever displayed in public. Families sometimes just throw them out when they are found in estates, or give them to people who collect them – not just

photos, but grisly souvenirs: sections of rope, or (in the case of Claude Neal) a finger or toe, kept in alcohol in a bottle (two of which still exist, in private hands in Marianna, I've been told.)

I was eventually able to track down Marvin Dunn, who is a retired psychology professor from FIU, who grew up in the Jim Crow South, and has made it his mission to unearth the whitewashed racial violence that was a prominent, if rarely discussed, feature of early life in the Sunshine State. When I told Marvin I'd like to see the photograph, he offered to bring it to me. I had no idea where he lived at that time, and that in order to show me the photograph he had to drive the six-hour drive from Miami; just told him to bring it by.

It made for one of the strangest moments of my life, and no doubt in Marvin's, as we had moved out of downtown Newberry to a house in the country on a lime rock road, fourteen miles west of Gainesville, deep in the heart of the old West End. We aren't visible from the road, but seven acres into a closed canopy forest, with a listing tobacco barn to the left for a compass. My cookbook was *The Cracker Kitchen* – a celebration of Cracker

Florida, and my accent sounds like I grew up in a convict camp myself. For Marvin Dunn to jump in his car in Coral Gables and drive far off the beaten track to show a self-proclaimed Florida Cracker a lynching photo: that's a man serious in his work.

It didn't take too much nerve on my part; I was just curious. Without much ado, Marvin came to the house the next day and after a few pleasantries, slid the mob photograph onto an ottoman in my living room. I don't remember my exact reaction; possibly stark silence, because the photograph, enlarged for detail, was shocking in every sense of the word. The strewn corpses were shocking; as were the smiling faces of the mob. The fact that I recognized a few of them was not good at all. Especially as one of the younger faces was surely, surely, that of my old friend Doc Berry. And on the end were the Dudley brothers – of course! Deputy Wynne was their uncle.

There have only been a few times in my life that I have been literally speechless; but that was one of them. Marvin knew I recognized some faces; it was obvious by my reaction. I'd been on the Newberry historic

committee in the early nineties and had supported and celebrated Myrtle Dudley's great gift to the State. Back then, Dudley was a jungle, the entire property overgrown so completely you could barely make out the bones of the farm.

At historic or social occasions, Myrtle herself would greet you from her wheelchair on the porch, and if you were polite enough, would offer a hand, and tell you a tale or two, or at least nod while one of the attendant rangers told the tale. The Newberry Garden club had a few events there, always made lively by a flock of barred-rock roosters who would chase hens while a gloved and hatted member of some sister-chapter tried to talk about native plants.

Billy Berry was a huge supporter of the State Park, and sold (or bartered; we never knew) some of his own farm land to extend the Park by seventy acres. On one of the first public days, he walked me around the property and showed me where the ponds once were, as well as the old Gainesville and Jonesville Roads, which had made the farm such a popular crossroads. He owned the original farm houses on the Jones property

across the highway and he took me on a tour of those buildings, too, which he sadly noted were not as well-preserved. The Dudley's had built their farm buildings on stone foundations. The Jones family had not, and their tobacco barns were not fit for reclamation, he thought. Indeed, they are long demolished, the flowering peach trees the only sign of the place the old Jones homestead once stood.

Billy's cousin Katie Bea was not as enthused with the reclamation of the Dudley homestead. Once, at another Garden Club event there, when I saw Myrtle on the porch, and proposed we speak to her, Katie Bea replied dryly, "Oh, I know Myrtle," and refused to go up the walk to pay homage.

She waited by the gate till I returned, and commented that one of the Dudley sisters had been a substitute teacher in Newberry, and had given her a whipping as a child. "She made a good job of it," Katie Bea commented shortly.

She was not alone in her measured response to the state-wide celebration that surrounded the great coup of Myrtle donating the family farm. The black farmers of Jonesville, many of whom were descendants of

families who lived in the area in 1916 watched the State of Florida's extensive and expensive refurbishment with a side-eye, especially the museum and walking tours, where the individual members of the Dudley family were celebrated with Disney-like enthusiasm. The farm mare was named Dollie, after a Dudley daughter; the mule was Fred, after another kinsman. There were roses named for daughters, and excerpts from the Captain's letters on display, all presenting the Dudley family as prototypes of the pioneering East Florida Cracker, famous for their work ethic, their independence and above all, their southern hospitality. All of which was perfectly true as far as it went; it just didn't go very far.

The official Dudley biography, which was published in by the Presses of the University of Florida, [University Presses of Florida?] and sold at the gift shop, gave an entire chapter to the lynching, with a selectiveness that said everything and said nothing. Newspapers, when were then (and now) primary sources for the lynching were quoted, and the basic elements were relayed: a deputy shot and hogs thieves hung. The thornier details, such as Frank Dudley's admitted participation, and the

absolute complicity of the family, and fact much of the violence might well have occurred on the land now set aside as a State Park – that was omitted. The fact that black neighbors came to the Dudley's for protection and were given it was presented in a way that put an obviously wrong spin on the entire week.

One thing the biography did was provide was a photograph of the Dudley sons, and before I'd go so far as to identify a face in a mob photo, I needed some collaboration. I found my ten-year-old copy of the biography, bought and read many years before, and compared the faces of the Dudley sons and the men in the photograph, and they were a match.

Even with the verification of the photographs in the Dudley biography, I hesitated to ID the people I recognized in the photograph, at least for a few moments. I actually pretended to need to pee and left Marvin alone in the living room while I retired to the bathroom to take a breath and consider the implications. It suddenly seemed a foolish diversion, in a time of present-day violence and racial strife, to drag up a ninety-nine-year old murder. At that time, I had no idea that Myrtle

Dudley had spoken of the lynching, and that Frank Dudley had done an interview back in '77 that was delivered to all of Newberry in a Sunday supplement. I thought I was the only person on earth who had connected the dots and I wasn't happy to be in that position.

But what else could I do? It was true. I didn't know the details, and as Frank Dudley predicted, I almost certainly would *never* know them, not 100%, in a sure and fast way, an incompleteness that momentarily paralyzed me. What I did know was the faces, and by the laws of the Golden Rule, figured that if it was my grandmother in that photograph, tossed into the dirt at the feet of a smug and satisfied mob, and someone could offer me the details of her death, I'd want to know them.

So I told Marvin what little I knew and he soon left, with a long drive to Miami before him. Unbeknownst to me, he stopped at Dudley and showed the photo to a ranger, who identified three of the Dudley sons. Marvin stopped by to tell me on his way home, and I was relieved. To me, the only worse than identifying someone in a lynch-mob photograph would be wrongly identifying them.

I was not on the inside of the State's reaction to the find; indeed, I was far, far outside of it. I'd regularly attended Plow Days and Cane Grindings at Dudley, and on the next one that came around, a few members of the Citizen's Support Organization recognized me and actually confronted me on the back porch in a way that would have been threatening if it hadn't been comic. One elderly white man became so agitated that he literally fell off the back steps (fortunately into the arms of my son-in-law and daughter, who caught him, saving a nasty fall.)

Months later, when Dollie the mare and Fred the mule escaped their pen and were hit and killed on highway 26, another citizen volunteer – the lady who had hosted Marvin Dunn's talk months before - hinted to me that he was responsible; [WHAT??] comment that was as ludicrous as it sounds, but at the moment shook me up (Florida Crackers take mule health seriously.)

I had not breeched the Great Silence with much relish, and shortly after, my husband's job required we move out of state for several years, putting me even further from the action. I was till curious about all of it,

and when my novel came out and I went on a book tour, I told many a fine investigative journalist and historian the bizarre tale of a black family that had been lynched two miles from my house in 1916; all but begged them to do the work and write the story. No one took me up on it, and though I did more research and uncovered more connections, I didn't think I had the training, the patience or (maybe) the courage to write the story myself.

I did continue to collect data, and track down the odd side-trail, and when I was home in Florida, take a few trips, so low-key I practically wore a fake beard, to walk Dudley Farm. One holiday weekend I was babysitting my toddler grandson, and took him there to see the Cracker cows and stroll around. We were on the edge of summer in North Florida, and after an afternoon of hard rain, the farm was particularly lovely, all damp leaves and dappled sunshine; the enormous fig trees full of fruit that I sampled as I walked.

I no longer spoke to anyone at Dudley, and if any of the rangers or volunteers recognized me, they kept it to themselves, making for a serene visit, such as it had been in the early days, before I knew the complete

history of the Dudley family, and the secret that were hidden there. As I buckled my grandson in his car seat, I wondered if all the hard feelings the mob photograph had aroused were necessary, or even helpful? Maybe I was that most despised of all white Southerners: the guilt-ridden dilettante, with enough knowledge to stir the pot, but not enough to really contribute to solutions. As I drove to the Park gates, I considered the hard fact that maybe I was over-working this particular obsession, to no good end, without the favor of the Lord. When I stopped at highway 26, I looked left for traffic, then right, toward Newberry, where the State Park sign was set in big letters for the Memorial Day weekend. The sign said: Remember.

Sometimes you look to God for a sign and do not get one.

Sometimes you're not looking, and get one anyway.

So I have remembered, and put it on paper as best I know how, and end where we began, with the names of the victims of the people who, had we lived in the same era, would have been my neighbors; who died the weekend of August 18-19, 1916. They are: Deputy George Wynne. Jim Dennis. His brother Bert, and sister Mary, and her baby. His sister-in-law,

Stella Young, and her brother Andrew McHenry. Their friend and neighbor, the Reverend Josh Baskins.

I pray they rest in peace and rise in glory.

I pray it for us all.

Bibliography

The Crisis is the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP.) It was founded in 1910 by one of the leading intellectuals of his day, W.E.B. Du Bois, and was read nationally in 1916. *The Crisis* was the strongest voice against lynching in its day and regularly sent reporters South to investigate lynchings.

Myrtle Dudley's Oral History can be found at The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, online, in PGF download. The dates and details of the collection are included at the site.

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