

## Today in Columbus History:

On January 10, 1880, the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun* ran a story entitled "Gammon Murderers" about the latest details in the ongoing saga the murder of George W. Gammon. The local papers ran stories, almost daily since the vicious attack that killed Gammon on Friday, December 19, 1879, as he returned home from work.

Gammon was a junk dealer in 1879, advertising for rags, hides, bees wax and other items. He bought out John Mehaffey's rag and junk business in 1877 and did business in a suburb of Columbus called Wammock's Hill or Wammockville. Apparently, this was an area around 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and 15<sup>th</sup> Street, south of Northern Liberties. The only references to the area that I could find were in the mid-to-late 1870's.

Gammon had lived in Columbus in the 1850's but moved to Taylor County where he was appointed postmaster in 1856 and 1857. He had survived the trainwreck in Columbus that killed more than a dozen people on December 31, 1858. The 1860 census lists him as a railroad agent in Taylor County, as well. Gammon was back in Columbus in the late 1870s with his wife Mary Crawford Gammon and five children. He was also the uncle of James T. Gammon, a Columbus grocer and member of the Mt. Hermon Lodge No. 304.

The first report of the crime came when Hilliard Dixon a local African American man reported finding a bloody shawl, bucket, and coat to Mr. J. W. Kimbrough, on whose property he lived. Kimbrough enlisted the help of several others including N. B. Roberts and a Mr. Brown along with Dixon to search the area. They turned up a hat, shoes and eventually the body of George Gammon. He was lying in the woods a few yards from the road with his pockets turned out. They quickly identified his body and returned it to his family. The coroner held an inquest over Gammon's body the next day.

The attacker had slit Gammon's throat from ear to ear, scattering his belongs in the process and taking his money. Suspicions turned quickly to the men who found his belongs. The original story given to the coroner by Hilliard Dixon said he was traveling down the road in a wagon with his sister Fanny Jakes, her husband, West Jakes and Dixon's nephew Frankie Taylor. John Gazaway was cutting wood nearby. Dixon, Jakes and Gazaway turned on each other with numerous versions of the events leading to Gammon's death.

In today's article, West Jakes "confesses" that the other men did the killing. Traveling in their wagon, Jakes and Gazaway left Dixon at the spot where Gammon was later killed. After passing Gammon on the road, Gazaway jumped out to double back through the woods, get ahead of Gammon and meet back up with Dixon. When Jakes later came upon the shawl, bucket and coat, he knew that Gammon was dead. The story went further to say that Gazaway told another prisoner that Dixon held Gammon while he "did the work."

On the day after the crime, the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, under the headline of "Horrible Crime!" speculated, that the perpetrators might be brought before "Judge Lynch" before they could be tried in Superior Court. The paper reported that at the time of the writing (3 a.m.) a party was out looking to do just that. However, it was not to be. In fact, all three suspects testified at the coroner's inquest.

The court severed the cases against Dixon, Gazaway and Jakes, meaning each would go to trial separately. Both Dixon and Gazaway went to trial in June 1880. The juries found them both guilty of murder and Judge Wimberly sentenced them to life in prison. When West Jakes finally went to trial in June 1881, the jury found him not guilty and set him free. Gazaway died in prison in 1893 but Dixon earned a parole in 1914. He died in Columbus of natural causes in 1928.

Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

*Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.*

**GAMMON MURDERERS.**

**A Bona Fide Confession---West Jake and John Gazaway "Blow" On Their Pals---What Our Little Bird Told Us.**

Yesterday morning quite a ripple of excitement was caused by the announcement that the negroes in jail charged with the murder of Mr George W Gammon, had made a confession. Mr Comer, at the request of West Jake, sent for Col H Bussey and Hon Reese Crawford. These gentlemen went to the jail and conversed with the prisoner. Mr Crawford, Jake's counsel, held a private conversation with him (West,) and on coming out refused to divulge what passed, or allow the solicitor to talk with him (West) at present. Next Monday was appointed as a time for another visit to the prisoners, when more facts can be obtained. The jailer, Mr Comer, and the counsel, both for the state and prisoner, refused to give us any of the facts, giving as a reason that if they were known that the ends of justice would be defeated. We disagreed with the gentlemen and went to work to find out what the confession was. A "little bird," which we have for such cases, came to our rescue. The facts are, West Jake made a full confession. He said

From the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, January 10, 1880, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

## HORRIBLE CRIME!

### MR. GEORGE W. GAMMON MURDERED AND ROBBED ON HIS WAY HOME.

Last night the startling intelligence that a man had been found dead in Bealwood, reached the city. Quite a number of people repaired to the spot, among whom was an ENQUIRER-SUN reporter. After some little difficulty the place was found, and

#### A HORRIBLE SIGHT

witnessed. Lying in a dense thicket of a swamp Mr. George W. Gammon was found dead—covered with blood. The pockets of his pants were turned out, and his shoes taken off. Those present crowded around to investigate the matter. The crowd was considerably excited, which was greatly increased on an examination which showed his throat had been cut almost

#### FROM EAR TO EAR.

To say that the sight was gastly would faintly express the horribleness of the scene. There was no other marks of vio-

Portion of the story on George W. Gammon's murder from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, December 20, 1879, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

## To My Friends and Patrons.

I HAVE THIS DAY sold my interest and good will in the Rag and Junk business to Mr. GEO. W. GAMMON, and respectfully solicit for him the liberal patronage heretofore extended to me.

JOHN MEHAFFEY.

Columbus, Ga., Feb. 20th, 1877. mh8 lw

Notice by John Mehaffey that George Gammon purchased his business, from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, March 8, 1877, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

# Rags and Hides!

HAVING bought out John Mehrifey, I am prepared to continue the

## RAGS, HIDES and PAPER BUSINESS

At his old stand on Oglethorpe Street.

Highest Cash Price Paid for RAGS, HIDES and COUNTRY PRODUCE.

I will also keep a good stock of FAMILY GROCERIES, which will be sold as reasonably as anywhere in the city.

Patronage Solicited.

**G. W. Gammon.**

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Ad for George W. Gammon's Rag & Junk Business from the *Columbus Daily Times*, June 30, 1877, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

### Wammockville.

Our reporter took a stroll through this suburb yesterday and was glad to notice considerable business activity there. Mr. Rosenthal and Mrs. McCook have creditable stores and are doing a good business. Several other smaller stores and shanties are also driving a living business. Mr. Hudley has an extensive wood and blacksmith shop, and is doing well. Three or four shoe shops seem to be well supplied with work. Our old friend Wammock is still alive and kicking and bears the appearance of good living. Altogether Wammockville has improved much during the last few years.

A story on Wammockville from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun* January 5, 1876, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.