

Today in Columbus History:

For today's post, I'll revisit and expand on the one I did last year on this date, which was prior to our current, more formal format. This particular murder has been mentioned a few times in related posts so I will try to tie them all together, as well.

On the morning of April 21, 1878, William L. Salisbury died in Columbus from a gunshot wound he received the night before in Seale, Alabama. An assailant shot Salisbury in the back as he walked along the platform at the Seale train depot on the night of April 20. He was in Seale as the defendant in libel suit brought by Dr. Robert U. Palmer. Salisbury's newspaper, the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* published an unflattering story about Palmer shooting up Browneville, Alabama, across the river in August 1876.

The article, written by Salisbury's future son-in-law, Thomas D. Huff, followed the murder of Palmer's uncle Orlando S. Holland by two Columbus policeman Thomas McEachern and Ed Cash and Cash's brother Babe, in 1874 (see my post on March 31). In that case, the *Enquirer-Sun* sided with the police while the *Columbus Times* sided with the Holland family. Palmer witnessed the killing on Broad Street, as did the victim's brother James T. Holland. Some witnesses claimed Palmer participated in the shootout, on behalf of his uncle.

Instead of resorting to gunfire over the article in question, Palmer sought relief in the courts for the editorial slight. Palmer filed the suit in Russell County, Alabama and the case came to trial in Seale, Alabama on April 17, 1878. The testimony wrapped up on April 21 and the jury reached its verdict before 9:00 pm. Palmer prevailed in the courtroom. However, the damage award was only a penny, instead of the \$250,000 he sought.

Salisbury and his entourage, including his son-in-law Thomas D. Huff, his attorney Mark Blandford and his friend Thomas E. Blanchard left their hotel and walked to the train station that night. Several witnesses saw Palmer waiting on the platform in the dark. A shot rang out and everyone else scattered while Salisbury fell to the floor. He managed to get off a couple of rounds as he fell, narrowly missing J.T. Holland, also waiting on the train.

Witnesses summoned Dr. Williams and Salisbury expressed a desire to die at home. The doctor and Salisbury's friends boarded the train with the victim and returned to Columbus. Salisbury died at this home the next morning after providing a statement as to the events of that evening and dictating his last will and testament. The next day, Columbus held one of the largest funeral processions in the city's history.

Palmer disappeared after the shooting and did not turn up until May 6th, as he crossed a road near Crawford. Two men riding along the road recognized Palmer and apprehended him for the lucrative rewards offered for his capture.

The jury found Palmer not guilty of the murder of Salisbury at his trial in January 1880. Almost five years later, on Christmas Eve, 1884 Orlando Holland's son Harry Holland sought to avenge his father's death after a chance meeting with Tiff Moore, the acting sheriff during the Holland murder trial (see my post of October 7). The shootout left Tiff Moore dead and like the other two cases, no one went to prison.

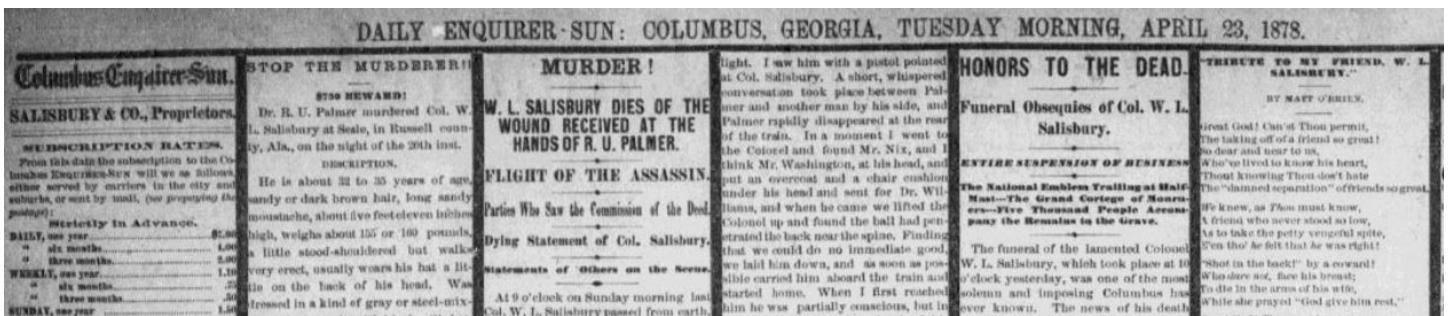
Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

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.



Photo of William L. Salisbury proprietor of the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* and president of the Merchants and Mechanics Bank (Courtesy of Historic Columbus Foundation).



The *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* of April 23, 1878, draped in black for the "mourning" edition.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF COL. W. L. SALISBURY.

THE FUNERAL PROCESSION.

AN IMMENSE THROG OF PEOPLE—THE BUSINESS HOUSES CLOSE IN HONOR OF THE DECEASED—A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE—A LARGE REWARD FOR THE CAPTURE OF HIS MURDERER—CONFLICTING RUMORS ABOUT THE TAKING OF THE ASSASSIN.

Hardly had our community learned the particulars of the shooting of Col. Salisbury from the Sunday morning papers, when the sad news was borne over the city that he was dead. He passed away at ten o'clock on Sunday morning. The people on Sunday talked of little else than the shocking occurrence of the shooting and the death of the deceased. No event that has ever happened in the history of Columbus has excited as much comment and elicited as profound a sympathy. The expression of opinion was unanimous in condemnation of the man who did the deed. Yesterday morning the funeral took place from the late residence of the deceased on Front street.

The service began at ten o'clock. Long

Story of Salisbury's funeral, one of the largest in Columbus history, from the *Columbus Daily Times*, April 23, 1878, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

THE ASSASSINATION OF COLONEL SALISBURY.

A FULL REPORT FROM SEALE.

Col. Holland in no Way Implicated.

SEALE, ALA., April 21st, 1875.

As is usually the case in moments of such intense excitement as prevailed at the scene of the deplorable tragedy, in our town last night, which has resulted fatally to Col. Salisbury, some mistaken and erroneous impressions as to the particulars have gone abroad. The jury in the Palmer-Salisbury libel suit, having rendered their verdict about 9 o'clock, a train at the depot was in readiness for those desiring transportation to Columbus. Col. S. and his friends did not return to the court house, but remained at their hotel after tea, Col. Samford being present when the jury came in. Dr. Palmer and his father returned to the court house, and remained until the verdict was announced, when they retired, not a word having been uttered by either, so far as

Story of the murder of W. L. Salisbury from the *Columbus Daily Times*, April 23, 1878,
<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

STOP THE MURDERER!

\$1650 REWARD!

Dr. R. U. Palmer

Murdered COL. W. L. SALISBURY at Seale, in Russell county, Ala., on the night of the 20th inst.

DESCRIPTION:

He is about 32 or 35 years of age, sandy or dark brown hair, long sandy moustache, about five feet eleven inches high, weighs about 135 or 160 pounds, a little stoop shouldered but walks very erect, usually wears his hat a little on the back of his head. Was dressed in a kind of gray or steel-colored cassimere suit, with black silk hat.

We will give Five Hundred Dollars reward for his arrest and delivery to the Sheriff of Russell county.

BLANCHARD, WILLIAMS & CO.

April 21, 1878.

\$250 REWARD.

A Reward of Two Hundred and Fifty Dollars will be paid for the apprehension and delivery to the Sheriff of Russell county, Ala., (with proof to convict,) of one

ROBERT U. PALMER,

Who Murdered Alderman W. L. SALISBURY, at Seale, Ala., on the night of the 20th instant.

DESCRIPTION:

Said Palmer is about 35 years old, about six feet high, long sandy moustache, weighs about 155 pounds, and is a little round or stoop shouldered, but walks very erect.

F. G. WILKINS,

Mayor of Columbus, Ga.

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Proclamation by the Governor of Ala.

STATE OF ALABAMA—EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT.

WHEREAS, authentic information has reached this Department that on the night of the 20th of April, 1878, Dr. R. U. PALMER murdered one W. L. Salisbury at Seale, in Russell county, Alabama, and is now a fugitive from justice.

Now, therefore, I, Geo. S. Houston, by virtue of the power and authority in me vested as Governor of Alabama, do issue this my proclamation, offering a reward of FOUR HUNDRED DOLLARS for the arrest and delivery of the said Dr. R. U. Palmer to the Sheriff of Russell county, Alabama—the reward to be paid to such person or persons as the said Sheriff may certify to be entitled thereto.

Given under my hand and the Great Seal of State of Alabama, at the City of Montgomery, on this the 23rd of April, A. D., 1878, and of the Independence of the United States of America the 102nd year.

GEO. S. HOUSTON.

By the Governor:

R. K. BOYD, Sec'y of State.

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\$500 REWARD

IN ADDITION TO THE OTHER REWARDS Offered for the Capture of

DR. R. U. PALMER,

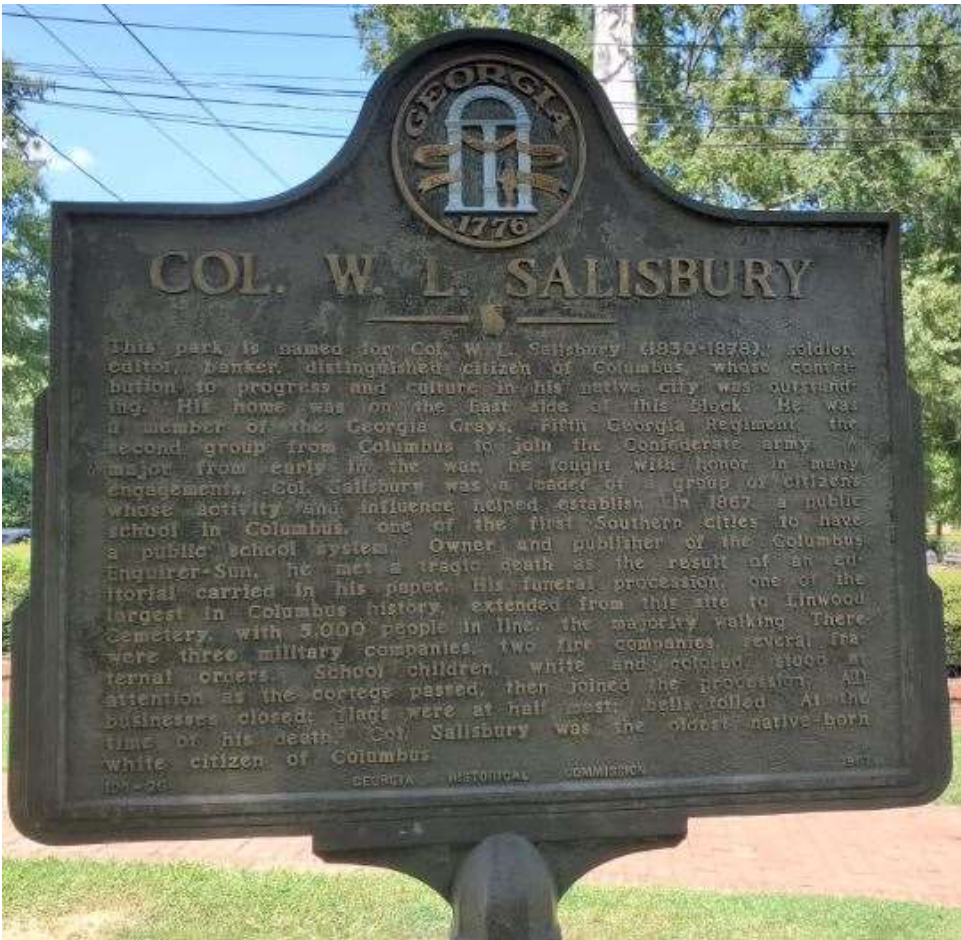
the Murderer of W. L. SALISBURY, I will pay Five Hundred Dollars to any person or persons who will capture the said R. U. Palmer and deliver his person to the Sheriff of Russell county, Ala., (with proof to convict.)

C. E. HOCHSTRASSER.

Columbus, Ga., April 26, 1878.

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Ad for the various rewards offered for the capture of Dr. Robert U. Palmer from the Columbus Daily Times, April 26, 1878, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



Marker in Salisbury Park, named for W. L. Salisbury who used to live on the east side of the Broadway between 7th and 8th Street (photo courtesy of Daniel Bellware).



Grave of William Lewis Salisbury and his wife Sarah Corzine Salisbury at Linwood Cemetery (photo courtesy of Daniel Bellware).