

Today in Columbus History:

On December 2, 1881, a story appeared in the *Daily Columbus Enquirer-Sun* entitled "Supposed Murderer, Of the Walker Brothers Arrested at Union Springs" that tells how the suspicious behavior of Frank Haynes got him arrested for the heinous triple murder of the sons of J. P. Walker of Russell County, Alabama – a murder he didn't commit. Haynes made the mistake of striking up a conversation with Maj. John A. Colvin on the train from Fort Mitchell to Troy, Alabama.

You may recall Maj. Colvin as the husband and brother-in-law of the partners Mrs. Colvin and Miss Donnelly, milliners of Columbus (Today in Columbus History Oct. 14). The city was abuzz with news of the grisly ax-murder of Russell County residents Wilburn, Alonzo and William Walker near Aberdeen, Mississippi. In fact, a story on the front page of the December 2, 1881 *Daily Columbus Enquirer-Sun* entitled "The Murder of Mr. J. P. Walker's Sons - - Additional Particulars" provided an update on the case that very same day. It was a follow up to the first report on November 30 entitled "Tripple [sic] Tragedy, Three Brothers Sleeping the Slumber of Death, In a Bed of Blood! Horrible Fate of the Walker Brothers."

James Phillip (J. P.) Walker was a well-known resident of Russell County. He was a farmer, county commissioner and apparently judge, who along with his wife Georgia Ann Richardson, raised their nine children in Uchee. In 1881, J. P. decided to relocate to Arkansas. Prior to that relocation, he entrusted three of his sons with some valuable property to transport to Arkansas ahead of the family. That decision resulted in the untimely deaths of the young men. One by one, Alonzo, age 14; William, age 19 and Wilburn, age 26; were struck in the head with a hatchet they had brought with them from Alabama. Only Wilburn, the last to die, was awake when he was killed.

On December 4, the *Enquirer-Sun* reported the release of Frank Haynes, as they had no cause to detain him. However, the paper stated, "from the many conflicting stories, and general inconsistency of his assertions it was evident to those who conversed with him that he was guilty of some crime." The authorities were already tracking down the true culprits. The December 6 *Enquirer-Sun* reported that an accomplice, William Miller had given the entire story to the authorities after his capture.

The Walkers supposedly carried a large sum of money and Miller was promised \$200 for his help in taking it. However, Miller never received his share. Instead, he provided enough information for the authorities to find Robert Jones, the actual murderer. News of Jones' capture arrived in Columbus on Christmas Eve. On Christmas day, Columbus residents read that Jones had made a full confession. Both men went to the gallows on March 3, 1882.

Tragedy followed the Walker family to Arkansas. Only a few months after the hanging of Jones and Miller, J. P. Walker, father of the murdered boys found himself in a deadly dispute. He and William Snoddy shared the ownership of a mill in Goodwin, Arkansas. The men disagreed on how to divide the assets of the partnership and decided to settle it with guns. Snoddy shot Walker first, in the stomach with a pistol. Walker returned fire with a shot gun to the chest. Snoddy died instantly and Walker lingered until the following day. Some of the widow Walker's relatives went out to Arkansas to bring her home to Russell County, but she remained in Arkansas with several of her surviving children.

The violent history of the Walker family does not end there. A fifth member of the family, James Torbet Walker, another son of James Phillip Walker was shot and killed in 1894. He was a deputy sheriff in Goodwin, Arkansas at the time. He was looking for some local criminals including one Owen Henley, in particular. Henley heard that Walker was after him and armed himself for the encounter. Afterward, Henley was able to make a case for self-defense and was acquitted of Walker's murder.

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.

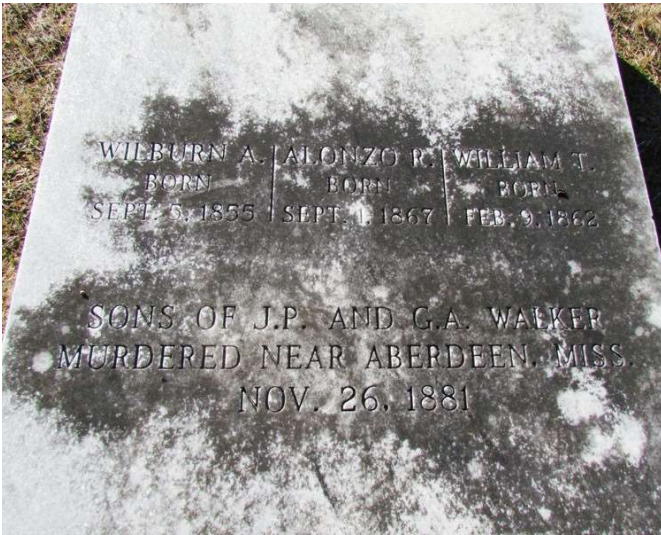
SUPPOSED MURDERER

Of the Walker Brothers Arrested at Union Springs.

Wednesday afternoon a young man of pleasing address, wearing a good business suit, boarded the Mobile & Girard passenger train at Fort Mitchell, Alabama. He took a seat near Major John A. Colvin and began a conversation, which partially led to his arrest. He told the major that he was from Wetumpka, Alabama; that he had sold his horse when within five miles of Columbus; that he intended to go to Florida, but had missed the boat at Columbus and was then on his way to Troy, Alabama, from which place he wanted to go to the Land of Flowers. He contradicted himself several times, and could not give any reason for walking to Fort Mitchell in order to get on the train.

It seems there were parties who thought he was guilty of the murder of the Messrs Walker near Aberdeen, Miss, and when his conversation with Major Colvin, with all of its inconsistencies, were made known it was resolved to have him arrested, or at least a watch kept upon his actions. When the train reached Sale the officers of Union Springs were telegraphed to "spot" the man. Some supposed him to be the man who joined the Walker party in their trip west. At Union Springs the marshal of the town boarded the train, arrested the man and conveyed him to the lock-up. He gave his name as Frank Haynes. He is still confined, awaiting further developments.

Frank Haynes apprehended for the murder of J. P. Walker's three sons, *Daily Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, December 2, 1881, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



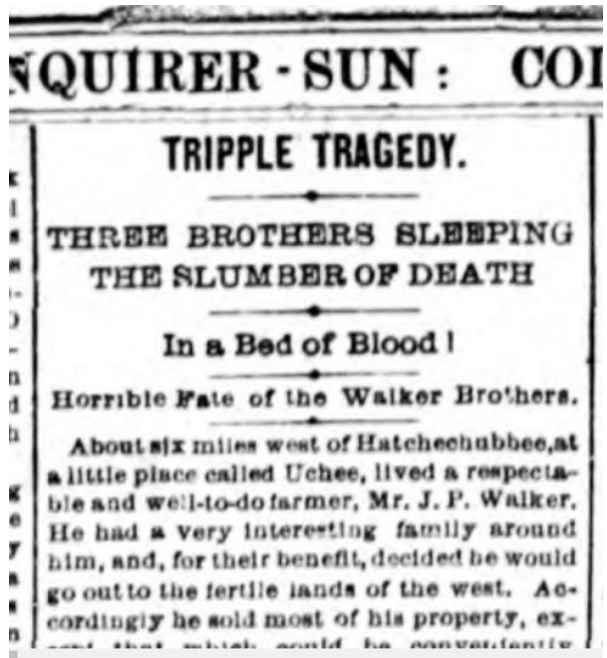
Grave of the three murder victims, Wilburn, Alonzo and William Walker, buried together in the Walker Williamson Cemetery, Uchee, Russell County, AL. From FindAGrave.com.

The Murder of Mr. J. P. Walker's Sons
---Additional Particulars.
[Special to the Memphis Appeal.]

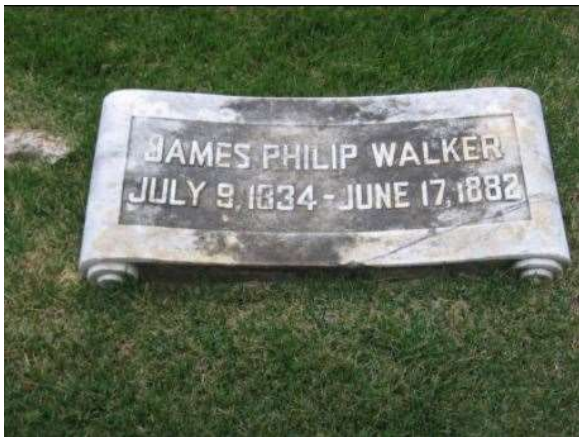
ABERDEEN, MISS., Nov. 28.—Perhaps the most horrible massacre that ever stained the annals of Mississippi, was effected three miles from here Saturday night, in the murder of Wilburn A. Walker, Alonzo R. Walker and a third party not known. On Saturday an emigrant train, consisting of a spring wagon, a covered road wagon and sulky, and party consisting of four men, were seen passing through our little city. No more was thought of the weary travelers until Sunday night about dark, when the whole community was shocked from centre to circumference at the announcement that three of the party had been foully murdered. Officers and a large posse left immediately for the scene, three miles west of here, where they found the party had camped. The horses and mules were tied up, nickering, and four hounds howling. On a mattress near lay the mutilated remains of three men, or rather two men and a mere boy, some fourteen years old. They had evidently all retired, and these three were asleep when the fourth arose, and with an ax and rapid blows with the blade, successively killed the three by striking each a full blow on the head, leaving a most frightful gash.

Death was instantaneous, as the cover over them was not in the least

This update to the story appeared on the front page of the *Daily Columbus Enquirer-Sun* on December 2, 1881.



Triple Tragedy from the *Daily Columbus Enquirer-Sun* November 30, 1881 , page 4.



Grave of James Phillip Walker in Forrest City Cemetery, Forrest City , Arkansas from FindAGrave.com.

RELEASED.

The Supposed Murderer of the Walker Brothers set at Liberty.

Yesterday the authorities of Union Springs, Ala., concluded, as there was no one to appear against the accused, and but little cause for his detention, to release Frank Haynes. It will be remembered by our readers that this was the man arrested on Wednesday afternoon on the Mobile and Girard railroad passenger train at Union Springs. He was thought to be the murderer of the Walker brothers near Aberdeen, Miss., about a week since.

From the many conflicting stories, and general inconsistency of his assertions it was evident to those who conversed with him that he was guilty of some crime, but as to what none could surmise. When arrested he was very cool, and made no resistance or objection, going quietly to the lock-up with the marshal. We understand that during the three days and a half of his confinement he made no remark that would serve as a clue as to from what or whom he was fleeing. He displayed no uneasiness, but quietly abided the consequences and meekly awaited the will of the authorities. There was no ground for his arrest, other than surpicion based on his conflicting assertions, but no doubt the officer did his duty in placing him in custody.

Frank Haynes released from custody (though evident that he was guilty of some crime). From the *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, December 4, 1881.

Will Remain in Arkansas.

Mr. John A. Richardson and Mr. Griffin have returned from Arkansas, where they went to persuade Mrs. J P Walker to return to Alabama. They found her so well situated with her sons, and getting along so well, that upon consultation with her it was decided that it would perhaps be better for her to remain. It will be remembered that she is the mother of the three brothers who were murdered and the widow of Mr. J P Walker, who was killed a short time ago.

Despite the murder of her husband and three sons, Mrs. Walker stays in Arkansas, July 14, 1882, *Daily Columbus Enquirer-Sun*.

THE FIFTH WALKER MURDER.

Four Sons and the Father Have Been Slain.

Hatchechubbee, Ala., March 9.--(Special.)—The murder of James Walker, at Forest City, Ark., makes the fourth son of Judge J. P. Walker who has met his death at the hand of the assassin. Judge Walker left this county in 1882 and went to Arkansas. He sent three of his sons through the country with some valuable stock. They were murdered in the outskirts of Aberdeen, Miss., and robbed by a white fiend and a negro accomplice. Judge Walker offered a reward of \$500, and the brutes were arrested, convicted and hanged.

The judge was himself murdered at his home in Arkansas in 1885, by a man whom Judge Walker had befriended when all others had deserted him. The family were among the best people of this county. Judge Walker's removal to Arkansas has almost annihilated the male members of the family. They were all quiet, unassuming men and boys. Mr. J. C. Walker, the only surviving son, resides at Uchee, Ala.

Story about the murder of James Torbet Walker in March 1894, from FindAGrave.com. Several of the facts stated in this article were incorrect. The elder James Walker was murdered in 1882, not 1885. Brothers George, Robert and Ocie survived in addition to John C. Walker after the younger James met his fate. Although not credited on FindAGrave, this article appears to be the one printed in the *Atlanta Constitution* on March 10, 1894.