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The Hangings of the Greene County Bridge Burners

by Donahue Bible of Mohawk, Tennessee

The hand-hewn, gray limestone pillars that still support the present Norfolk-Southern Railway Bridge across Lick Creek near Mohawk, Tennessee, are silent reminders of the night of November 8, 1861, when the bridge was burned by local Union men on the direct orders of President Abraham Lincoln.

In the autumn of 1861, the small community of Pottertown in western Greene County was involved in one of the most tragic events of the American Civil War. The executions by Confederate authorities of five Union men from the area's closely knit pottery-making families left devastation and heartbreak in its wake and forever changed the families and the community. The tragedy is still felt and often recalled, even today, 144 years later. Many of the descendants of the men hanged by the Confederates in November-December 1861 still live in the area. The fact that the five executed men were actually abandoned by the government of the United States left a bitter taste of betrayal among most of the families.

President Abraham Lincoln had solemnly vowed to protect the men and their families from the Confederate retribution expected in the aftermath of the bridge-burning. He had ordered an immediate invasion of East Tennessee to be mounted as soon as the bridges were burned. Because of the apparent insubordination of some of Lincoln's generals, that invasion did not come until two years later. By then, the five men had been executed and their families left destitute and reviled by the Confederates. The families were repeatedly told that their men had been hanged for "treason." For that reason, much of the history has been lost because family members were ashamed to relate the story to later generations. In fact, however, the men were heroes to the Union cause.

As related in the previous article by Dorothy Kelly, Reverend William B. Carter was to help carry out the plan to burn the East Tennessee railroad bridges on the night of November 8. He was to be accompanied by two Union officers, natives of the area of proposed operations, Captain David Fry of Greene County and Captain William Cross.

Captain David Fry traveled back to Greene County where he was sheltered at the home of a "Mr.



The Lick Creek bridge burners gathered at this home of Jacob Harmon, Jr., on the night of November 8, 1861. Shown here are Mr. & Mrs. William F. M. Harmon. W.F.M. "Uncle Billy" Harmon was only nine years old when his father and older brother were hanged. Courtesy descendants of William F. M. Harmon

Smith" on Little Chuckey Creek, not far from the home of Jacob Harmon, Jr., at "Pottertown," just west of Midway Depot. The Harmon farm was adjacent to the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad line, about two miles east of the Lick Creek railroad bridge, near present-day Mohawk.

The new brick home of Jacob Harmon, Jr., had been built in 1858, the same year that the railroad was completed. Jacob Harmon, Jr., and his brother John Harmon, along with their widowed mother, were the owners of several hundred acres of farm land lying on both sides of slow moving Lick Creek. In 1861, the Jacob Harmon, Sr., family had been living there for over sixty years. John Harmon, the older son, and his family still lived with his mother at the old log home of Jacob Harmon, Sr., about one-quarter mile west of the new brick home of Jacob Harmon, Jr.

Donahue Bible is a local historian especially versed in the history of Greene and surrounding counties. For his groundbreaking research into the events connected with the burning of the Lick Creek Railroad Bridge, he was awarded a special "Research Excellence Award" from the East Tennessee Historical Society. Mr. Bible is a former member of the ETHS Board of Directors and also served as the past vice president for Upper East Tennessee.

The Harmon lands along Lick Creek were made up of a heavy, gray clay, well suited for the production of utility grade pottery, which at that time was used in every household. The Harmons apparently had been involved with pottery making for many years, although they had always been listed by census takers as farmers. Pottery-making was part time and seasonal.

We now know from pottery shards unearthed by recent archaeological excavations on the former Harmon lands that other potters, including C.A. Haun (one of the men hanged) and J. A. Lowe, were engaged in pottery-making on land owned by John Harmon. Other potters, including Jacob M. Hinshaw (also hanged) and his father, William Hinshaw, were living close by and probably also made pottery on Harmon land. There was likely a lease arrangement for the kilns.

Jacob Harmon, Jr., a respected farmer and well-known Union advocate, was a quiet, 43 year-old family man and the father of seven children who ranged in age from the eldest son, 23 year-old Thomas Harmon, to the youngest son, nine year-old William Francis Marion Harmon. There were three other sons: Henry, age 21, Joseph, age 15, and James Taylor Harmon, 14. The two daughters were Emaline, age 19, and 11 year-old Candacy Harmon. The mother, Malinda (Self) Harmon, age 43, was a sister to Harrison Self, the only convicted bridge burner to be pardoned.

On the afternoon of November 7, 1861, Jacob Harmon, Jr., rode around his neighborhood, quietly contacting the men of known Union allegiance in the Pottertown settlement and other close-by communities. The date and time were set for 9 p.m. the following night, November 8. They were to meet at his home where Captain David Fry would swear them in. Jacob Harmon was to be his local "pilot" to the bridge. Two of Jacob Harmon's sons, Thomas and Henry, took part in the bridge burning. Henry, the younger of the two, was hanged, along with his father, in Knoxville on December 17, 1861. Parson Brownlow witnessed the executions from his jail cell.

As planned, the neighbors began gathering at the Harmon home to get their instructions from Captain Fry. It is now known from records found in the U.S. National Archives that all of the participants were actually sworn into the Union Army for the night's work. Each man was made a member of Company F, Second Tennessee Volunteer Infantry, the company and regiment of Captain David Fry.

According to later testimony, at about 2 a.m., the large party of 40 to 60 men crossed the two hills from the Jacob Harmon, Jr., home to the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad Bridge across Lick Creek.

There they surprised the seven Confederate guards who were huddled around a small fire in a tent trying to stave off the chill of the November night. The bridge burners ordered the Confederate soldiers to surrender their arms and remain quiet as they set the bridge ablaze.

It is said that a discussion ensued among the Union men about whether or not the Confederates should be killed. It was decided that if the prisoners would take an oath of allegiance to the United States and swear not to report the names of any of the bridge burners whom they might recognize, they would be spared. This act of mercy proved to be the undoing of the bridge-burners.

Before the end of the next day (Sunday), Jacob Harmon, Jr., and his two sons Thomas and Henry, along with neighbor Christopher Alexander "Alex" Haun, were captured and sent to the Confederate jail at Knoxville. Witnesses among the seven released Confederate guards at the bridge later testified at a drum-head court-martial in Knoxville, that they heard one of the bridge-burners ask, as they were gathering their belongings, "Who has Henry Harmon's gun?" This identification led to the arrests of the three Harmons and Haun and doomed young Henry Harmon.

As anticipated, the burning of the Lick Creek Bridge and several others on the same night created panic among the Confederate officials in East Tennessee and in Richmond. Confederate Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin sent a dispatch to Confederate States Attorney for the District of Tennessee, J. C. Ramsey in Knoxville, stating: "I am very glad to hear of the action of the military authorities and hope to hear they have hung every bridge-burner at the end of the burned bridge."

Secretary Benjamin immediately dispatched Colonel Danville Leadbetter from Richmond with a battalion of engineers to rebuild the bridges—and hang the bridge burners. Colonel Leadbetter took both assignments seriously. On November 30, 1861, a dispatch from Colonel Leadbetter to Secretary of War Benjamin, from Greeneville, Tennessee stated;

"Hon. J. P. BENJAMIN, Secretary of War:

Two insurgents have to-day been tried for bridge-burning, found guilty and hanged.

D. LEADBETTER, Colonel."

The "two insurgents" referred to in that message were 37 year-old Henry Fry and Jacob Madison "Matt" Hinshaw, age 20, the son of William Hinshaw of Pottertown. Both father and son were potters. Fry and Hinshaw had fled to Cocke County where they managed to elude the Confederate patrols for nearly three weeks before being captured near Parrottsville.

#4 | 2 | Tenn.

Jaest Harmon
Plt., Co. F, 2 Reg't East Tenn. Inf.*

Appears on
Company Muster Roll
 for Pay to Dec 31, 1861
 Present or absent _____
 Stoppage, \$ _____ for _____
 Due Gov't, \$ _____ for _____

Remarks: Hang'd by ten rebels December 19-

NEXT ROLL ON FILE, APR 1862
 FROM SECOND AUDITOR'S ROLL.
Plt. entry in Rollbook
 *This organization subsequently became Co. F, 2 Reg't Tenn. Inf.

Book mark: _____

(858) Seary Copyist

#4 | 2 | Tenn.

Henry Harmon
Plt., Co. F, 2 Reg't East Tenn. Inf.*

Appears on
Company Muster Roll
 for Pay to Dec 31, 1861
 Present or absent _____
 Stoppage, \$ _____ for _____
 Due Gov't, \$ _____ for _____

Remarks: Hang'd by ten rebels December 19-

NEXT ROLL ON FILE, APR 1862
 FROM SECOND AUDITOR'S ROLL.
Plt. entry in Rollbook
 *This organization subsequently became Co. F, 2 Reg't Tenn. Inf.

Book mark: _____

(858) Seary Copyist

#4 | 2 | Tenn.

Christopher A. Harmon
Plt., Co. F, 2 Reg't East Tenn. Inf.*

Appears on
Company Muster Roll
 for Pay to Dec 31, 1861
 Present or absent _____
 Stoppage, \$ _____ for _____
 Due Gov't, \$ _____ for _____

Remarks: Hang'd by ten rebels December 19-

NEXT ROLL ON FILE, APR 1862
 FROM SECOND AUDITOR'S ROLL.
Plt. entry in Rollbook
 *This organization subsequently became Co. F, 2 Reg't Tenn. Inf.

Book mark: _____

(858) Seary Copyist

#4 | 2 | Tenn.

Henry Jay
Plt., Co. F, 2 Reg't East Tenn. Inf.*

Appears on
Company Muster Roll
 for Pay to Dec 31, 1861
 Present or absent _____
 Stoppage, \$ _____ for _____
 Due Gov't, \$ _____ for _____

Remarks: Hang'd by ten rebels December 22-

Only roll on which name appears

NEXT ROLL ON FILE, APR 1862
 FROM SECOND AUDITOR'S ROLL.
Plt. entry in Rollbook
 *This organization subsequently became Co. F, 2 Reg't Tenn. Inf.

Book mark: _____

(858) Seary Copyist

#4 | 2 | Tenn.

Jaest M. Harmon
Plt., Co. F, 2 Reg't East Tenn. Inf.*

Appears on
Company Muster Roll
 for Pay to Dec 31, 1861
 Present or absent _____
 Stoppage, \$ _____ for _____
 Due Gov't, \$ _____ for _____

Remarks: Hang'd by ten rebels December 22-

NEXT ROLL ON FILE, APR 1862
 FROM SECOND AUDITOR'S ROLL.
Plt. entry in Rollbook
 *This organization subsequently became Co. F, 2 Reg't Tenn. Inf.

Book mark: _____

(858) Seary Copyist

These military records show that the Lick Creek Bridge Burners were not acting as civilians, as previously believed, but were actually sworn into the Union Army prior to their activities on November 8, 1861. Courtesy Donahue Bible

PROCLAMATION

To the Citizens of East Tennessee,

So long as the question of Union or Disunion was debatable, so long you did well to debate it and vote on it. You had a clear right to vote for the Union, but when Secession was established by the voice of the people, you did ill to distract the country by angry words and insurrectionary tumult. In doing this you commit the highest crime known to the laws.

Out of the Southern Confederacy no people possess such elements of prosperity and happiness as those of East Tennessee. The Southern market which you have hitherto enjoyed only in competition with a host of eager Northern rivals, will now be shared with a few States of the Confederacy equally fortunate, politically and geographically. Every product of your agriculture and workshops will now find a prompt sale at high prices, and so long as cotton grows on Confederate soil, so long will the money which it brings, flow from the South through all your channels of trade.

At this moment you might be at war with the United States, or any other foreign nation, and yet not suffer the tenth of the evils which pursue you in this Domestic strife. No man's life or property is safe, no woman or child can sleep in quiet. You are deceived by selfish demagogues who take care for their own personal safety. You are citizens of Tennessee, and your State one of the Confederate States.

So long as you are up in arms against these States can you look for any thing but the invasion of your homes, and the wasting of your substance? This condition of things must be ended. The Government commands the peace and sends troops enough to enforce the order. I proclaim that every man who comes in promptly and delivers up his arms will be pardoned on taking the oath of allegiance. All men taken in arms against the Government will be transported to the military prison at Nashville and be confined there during the war. Bridge burners and destroyers of Rail Road track are excepted from among those pardonable. They will be tried by drum head court martial and be hanged on the spot.

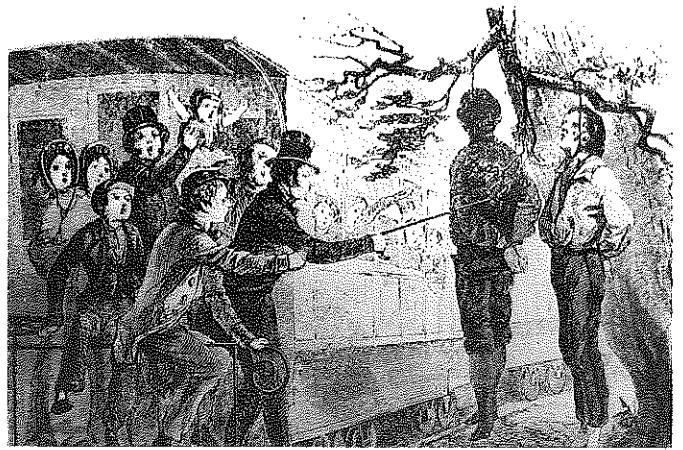
D. LEADBETTER,
Col. Comd'g.

Headquarters,
Greeneville, E. Tenn. Nov. 30th 1861.

Proclamation of Colonel Danville Leadbetter at Greeneville, Tennessee, November 30, 1861. Courtesy Donahue Bible

Hinshaw and Fry were returned to Greeneville where they were marched up Depot Street inside a square of Confederate guards. Near the Greeneville Depot, after a brief "drum-head court martial," both men were hanged from a large oak tree. They were hanged upon the orders of Col. Danville Leadbetter, a native of Maine, and their bodies were left hanging for 26 hours before anyone was allowed to cut them down.

After service in the United States Army following his graduation from West Point, Leadbetter had married a woman from Alabama and served as the chief engineer of that state for about twenty years. It was thought by some that Leadbetter's demonstrated zeal for hanging the bridge burners was an attempt to show his unquestioned loyalty to his adopted state and government. After Fry and Hinshaw were hanged, Leadbetter issued a proclamation from Greeneville in which he left no doubt about how he would treat anyone



Bodies of bridge burners being beaten by train passengers near Greeneville. The bodies remained on display for four days, prompted by a literal interpretation of an order from the Confederate War Department that read: "It would be well to leave their bodies hanging in the vicinity of the burned bridges." From *Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession*, courtesy of the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection of the Knox County Public Library.

convicted of burning bridges or otherwise destroying railroad property. They would be hanged on the spot.

Henry Fry was married to Barbara Wampler, age 36. She is buried beside him at old Blue Springs Cemetery in Mosheim. They were the parents of 17 year-old James Solomon Fry, 11 year-old Mary, four year-old Phillip and Martha, age one. Soon after Henry Fry's execution, the oldest son, James Solomon Fry, walked to Kentucky to join the Union Army. It is said that he watched his father hanged at Greeneville and that the Confederates gave him his father's horse.

Jacob Madison "Matt" Hinshaw has been misidentified by most writers for the past 140 years. The Confederate recorder at a later drum-head court martial in Knoxville wrote down his name as "Hensie." Pottertown neighbors always referred to the Hinshaw family as "Hinchey." That mispronunciation of the name is still sometimes heard today. It was written at the trial, as it sounded to the recorder.

Jacob M. Hinshaw, age 20, was married to 18 year-old Almirinda Walker, whose family lived near Bulls Gap in Hawkins County. The young Hinshaw couple had a 20 month-old child named William after his grandfather. Hinshaw's wife was pregnant at the time of his execution. The son born in January 1862, after his father's death, was named Jacob M. Hinshaw for his dead father. He spent his life on a farm near Bulls Gap.

Jacob M. Hinshaw (the father) was buried at the Long family cemetery near Bulls Gap. His widow, Almirinda, later married Gabriel Jenkins, raised a family with him, and lived until 1913. She is buried beside her first husband, young "Matt" Hinshaw, who

The Hangings of the Greene County Bridge-Burners

had been hanged as a bridge-burner on November 30, 1861. Their young son William, who died at age seven, is buried between them.

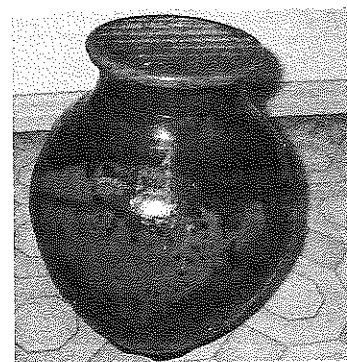
After his son, Matt, was hanged, 53 year-old William Hinshaw, the master potter, joined the Union Army (Company M, Second Illinois Light Artillery, then at Bulls Gap) and was badly wounded at the Battle of Blue Springs, only a short distance from his home at Pottertown. He is buried with his wife at the church cemetery at Mount Carmel in Greene County.

Eleven days after the executions of Fry and Hinshaw at Greeneville, C.A. "Alex" Haun, was hanged at Knoxville on December 11, 1861. Haun wrote at least two letters to his wife, Elizabeth, back in Greene County, giving her advice and instructions to help her raise their four children. Elizabeth was also pregnant and gave birth to daughter Mary Ann two months later. Haun arranged with his lawyer, Colonel John Baxter, to have his body shipped home to Midway Depot in Greene County for burial. That arrangement was transmitted to his wife in one of the letters. Elizabeth was not able to read and write and had to have someone read Haun's letters to her. Probably son Jacob Daniel did that, as he could read.

In another of the letters Haun instructed Elizabeth to get "Bohannon, Hinshaw, or Lowe [all potters], to finish that ware [uncompleted pottery]" so that she would have some income. He also told her to sell off his pottery tools, clay mill, and lead oven to raise some money. It was through these letters (read by this author about twelve years ago) that it was possible to identify Alex Haun as the mysterious potter who had left behind in Greene and surrounding counties a few beautiful examples of his work, marked "C. A. Haun & Co. No. 1." Now that his style is known, a few other unmarked pieces have been identified. One example of his work was recently shown in an exhibit at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville. Haun is now conceded to have been the finest potter at Pottertown—and probably in Tennessee.

In one letter to his wife, C. A. Haun mentioned his "copper mine" on the land of their neighbor Nathan Hawkins, about one mile away. He instructed Elizabeth to have the papers recorded attesting to his part interest in the mine. It has been determined in recent years that Haun was using a copper glazing to obtain the brilliant colors (yellow, green and orange) on his pottery. A low grade copper ore has been found at the site he mentioned on the Hawkins land.

C.A. Haun, in one of his final acts on earth, wrote to Colonel Baxter, one of his lawyers:



Christopher Alexander "Alex" Haun is now acknowledged to be the finest potter in Greene County's Pottertown Community, and perhaps in the state. Courtesy Donahue Bible..

Colonel Baxter, I have to die today at 12 o'clock. I beg of you to have my body sent to Midway Post Office directed to Elizabeth Haun. This much I beg of you—this the 11th day of December 1861.
C.A. Haun

C. A. "Alex" Haun age 40, left behind a pregnant widow, 36 year-old Elizabeth (Cobble) Haun, and four children—Jacob, 13, Rebecca, 12, Sarah, age five, Martha, two, and Mary Ann, who was born in February of 1862, two months after her father's death. Christopher Alexander "Alex" Haun, the executed bridge-burner, and now celebrated potter, is buried in the Concord Baptist Church Cemetery near Mohawk. The Haun family had settled in that area on Lick Creek, many years earlier.

After his father's hanging, Jacob Daniel Haun walked to Kentucky to join the Union army. He was sixteen years old when he joined 12th Kentucky Cavalry. He is buried near his mother at Mt. Hope Church Cemetery near Mohawk in Greene County.

On December 17, 1861, Jacob Harmon and his son Henry were hanged at Knoxville. Eye witnesses later stated that Henry Harmon was hanged first, and his father was forced to watch. It was said that the rope broke, and the young man had to be hanged the second time. The father then followed his son to the gallows, likely a welcome end to the anguish of the moment.

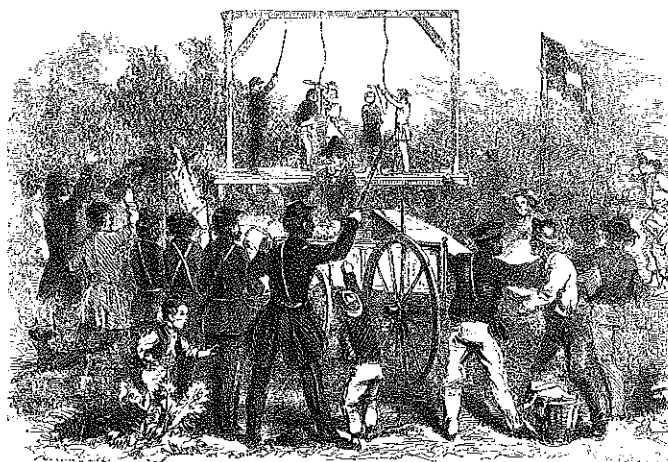
Both bodies were shipped home to his widow, Malinda Harmon, and arrived at the Midway Railroad Depot. A claim for \$42 for the service was later presented to his widow.

Father and son are buried in the old Harmon family cemetery at Pottertown, on the land of Jacob Harmon, Sr., who was buried there in 1843. On one side of them is the grave of son Thomas Harmon who died a few months after his father and brother from exposure and mistreatment in the wretched Confederate jail in Knoxville. His mother stated in a letter to General George H. Thomas, dated February 1, 1867, that her son was sent home from the jail at the point of death and died a few days afterwards. On the other side of them is the grave of Malinda Harmon who died in 1872. She was only 54 years old.

Only Harrison Self, the brother-in-law of Jacob Harmon, Jr., escaped the gallows after being condemned to death. His daughter telegraphed a message directly to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, pleading for mercy for her father.

Honorable Jefferson Davis: My father, Harrison Self, is sentenced to hang at four o'clock this evening, on a charge of bridge-burning. As he remains my earthly all and all my hopes of happiness center in him, I implore you to pardon him. Elizabeth Self.

Davis was so moved by the plea that he pardoned Self only minutes before he was to be hanged. "Parson" Brownlow, who was imprisoned in the same jail, helped the young girl draft the dispatch to Jefferson Davis. She went across the street to the telegraph office and sent the wire. Davis wired the message of pardon back to



Execution of Jacob Harmon and his son Henry.

Jacob Harmon and his son Henry were convicted of burning the Lick Creek bridge and executed at Knoxville on December 17, 1861. Henry was executed first while his father was forced to watch. From *Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession*, courtesy of the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection of the Knox County Public Library.



Interview of W. H. Self with his daughter in Knoxville Jail.

Harrison Self of Greene County, Tennessee, who had been found guilty of the bridge burning at Lick Creek, was scheduled for execution on December 27, 1861. His life was saved by a last minute appeal by his daughter to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, which was granted. From *Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession*, courtesy of the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection of the Knox County Public Library.

Knoxville with only minutes to spare.

That act of mercy so infuriated Secretary Benjamin that he released some of the other Greene County men who were being held in the jail. One of them was Jonathan Morgan, another of the potters at Pottertown. Morgan told of that experience in a letter he wrote in 1897. The family still has the letter.

In the aftermath of the executions, other family members of the five bridge burners volunteered for the service of the United States. Among those were James Solomon Fry and Jacob Daniel Haun, sons of two of the dead men mentioned earlier. Others were James Taylor Harmon, a younger son of Jacob Harmon, Jr., and his cousins Jacob Luther Harmon and Harrison C. Harmon, sons of Jacob's older brother, John Harmon.

Some other documented facts previously unknown were discovered by recent research, included the finding of deeds of trust located by the author of this article in the office of the Greene County Registrar only a few years ago. Those records show that while incarcerated in the Confederate jail or prison in Knoxville, Jacob Harmon, Jr., along with his sons Henry and Thomas, signed a deed of trust for a large tract of Greene County farmland to lawyers Haynes, Baxter, Fleming and Thornburg. This was a desperate attempt to save their lives by obtaining legal representation before Confederate authorities in Richmond. No records have been found to indicate that such an appearance was ever attempted by any of the lawyers.

The deeds were signed in the jail at Knoxville in the presence of Knox County Court Clerk William

Craig on the tenth of December 1861—one week before Jacob and Henry Harmon were hanged. The deed was then registered and recorded in Greene County on the thirteenth of December—four days before the executions. Lawyers Haynes, Baxter, and Fleming had also secured such a deed of trust from Christopher A. Haun on the ninth of December 1861, only two days before he was hanged.

Baxter actually foreclosed on the widow Harmon's property but was thwarted in his attempt by the intervention of Senator William G. "Parson" Brownlow in the Congress of the United States following the war.

Several entries in the *Congressional Record* (called the *Congressional Globe* in the early 1870s) well document the facts of Brownlow's success in getting at least some compensation for the widow and mother of the two Harmons who had been hanged at Knoxville.

Captain David Fry survived the war and spent much of the rest of his life trying to obtain help for the families of the five men whom he had unknowingly led to their deaths. He always felt responsible for the deaths of the Greene County bridge-burners because the U.S. Government had abandoned them—despite President Lincoln's promise of protection—to whatever fate the Confederate government chose to inflict upon them.

Captain Fry wrote letters of support to the U.S. Pension Agency on behalf of all the widows and minor children of the dead men. He stated that he had sworn them into the service of the United States at the home of Jacob Harmon, Jr., on the fateful night the Lick Creek Bridge was burned. He also stated that the names of all those sworn in at the Harmon home had been placed on the muster roll of his company but were burned by the adjutant, upon his orders, several months later when he realized that their capture was imminent in Lee County, Virginia. He feared that the disclosure of other names would result in more executions by the Confederates.

All of the dead men had been posthumously sworn into the service of the United States by a special act of Congress in 1863, so that the widows and children could receive a small pension. At that time, it was not known if Captain Fry was dead or alive, nor was it known by Congress that he had already made the men soldiers of the United States back on November 8, 1861, at the home of Jacob Harmon, Jr.

The five dead men who had been reviled as "traitors" by the Confederate authorities because they were civilians who had destroyed railroad property had actually been inducted into the Army of the United States—not once, but twice.

Today, the final resting place of each of the five men is marked with the official government grave marker

available to every veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces.

On Saturday, November 9, 2002, on the one hundred and forty-first anniversary of the burning of the Lick Creek Railroad Bridge, a large crowd, including many descendants of the bridge burners, gathered in a grassy field in front of the Harmon family cemetery at Pottertown to dedicate a beautiful granite monument and a steel flagpole as a memorial to the Greene County bridge burners. Money for the monument and the flagpole was donated by many people—some who lived nearby, or in some cases, across the United States.

On the six-sided monument, five of the panels are inscribed with the name and birth and death dates of each of the executed men. The sixth side displays a short summary of the bridge-burning and the resulting executions.

Around the top of the monument are inscribed the following words taken from the Union Army Monument on the Greene County Courthouse lawn: IN THE HOUR OF THEIR COUNTRY'S PERIL, THEY WERE LOYAL AND TRUE.

A military honor guard fired a 21-gun salute, and a military bugler played "Taps." Later, a kilted bagpiper played a haunting version of "Amazing Grace" as he slowly walked over the hill out of sight of the large crowd. It was a somber and dignified service, befitting the occasion.

Congressman William Jenkins of Tennessee's First Congressional District stated in no uncertain terms that the five men honored that day were



IN THE HOUR OF THEIR COUNTRY'S PERIL, THEY WERE LOYAL AND TRUE This six-sided monument near the Harmon Cemetery in Greene County is a memorial to the sacrifice of the five executed bridge burners. Courtesy of Donahue Bible

American heroes who had given their lives for their country. The descendants of the Pottertown bridge burners at last could feel proud, knowing that their ancestors' brave deed, for the first time, had been recognized, by an elected official of the government of the United States of America.

Research Notes from Donahue Bible Mohawk, Tennessee May 30, 2005

Donahue Bible was born in Greene County at the home of his grandparents near Mohawk on the farm where the Lick Creek Railroad Bridge is located. His grandfather, Enoch M. Bible, once owned the farm where the bridge still sits today on the original limestone pillars from the 1850s. The bridge was clearly visible from the front porch of their home.

Bible first recalls hearing stories about the burning of the bridge when he was a young boy in the early 1940s. A neighbor, Mr. Clarence Kirk, was a great-nephew of C.A. Haun, one of the men hanged, and he sometimes spoke of the incident.

In 1958, Greene County teacher and historian Harry Roberts wrote an article about the burning of the Lick Creek Bridge for *The Greeneville Sun*. That article started Donahue Bible on a search that has lasted 47 years, and continues today for any new "bridge burner" information or documentation.

The search has taken many interesting turns, such as finally discovering the correct identification of all the men, including the elusive Jacob M. Hinshaw, who had been identified incorrectly as "Jacob M. Hensie" for well over a hundred years. Bible also learned that the correct name of the Harmon son who was hanged was Henry, rather than Thomas, as had often been written.

In early accounts, written in the late 1800s, C. A. Haun was often misidentified as "A.C. Haun," who was actually another soldier from the area.

Both C.A. Haun and Jacob Harmon were often described in those early accounts as "old men." In fact, Harmon was 43 when he was hanged, and Haun was just past 40 years old.

One of the most surprising revelations to come from old documents was information contained in C.A. Haun's original letters to his wife, written from the Knoxville jail, in which it could be conclusively established that he was the long-dead mysterious potter, who created such beautiful examples of that craft.

Another important discovery was finding deeds of trust in Greene County, revealing that the Harmons and Haun had been led to believe by four lawyers that they

could get them freed in exchange for legal fees secured by a large tract of Greene County farmland. The lawyers had actually registered and recorded the deeds less than a week before the men were hanged.

Much new information was found in old copies of the *Congressional Globe* from the early 1870s, which revealed the long fight waged by Senator William G. "Parson" Brownlow in the Congress of the United States on behalf of Malinda Harmon, the widow of Jacob Harmon, Jr., and the mother of Henry Harmon, both of whom were hanged.

Perhaps the greatest frustration, especially in the early days of research, was the reluctance of older family members to talk about the bridge burning and the hangings. At that time, some persons were still living who had grown up with family members who had been alive when the men were hanged. It seems to have always been a shameful topic and seldom discussed.

This attitude is not so often encountered today, as the descendants have learned more about the true circumstances surrounding the tragic event. The earlier attitudes, however, have left many older persons with little knowledge of what actually happened in 1861.

As an example, a 95 year-old, well-educated, former teacher, a great granddaughter of Jacob Harmon, Jr., recently stated that it was not until the mid-1960s that she had learned that her great grandfather had been hanged. She was told the fact by an elderly aunt when she had questioned an old Harmon family Bible entry about the deaths of both Jacob Harmon and his son Henry on the same day and year. Even then, the aunt was reluctant to tell her about the bridge burning and subsequent hangings.

Another problem sometimes encountered in recent years when talking with descendants of the bridge burners is that often the stories they have heard from older family members were distorted or embellished. Some descendants of the executed men seem to have convinced themselves that their ancestors, while standing on the gallows, chose to die, rather than swear allegiance to the Confederacy. That seems to have been a way to ease the pain of the executions by believing that the dead men actually had a choice.

All known contemporary documents point to the fact that the men were virtually condemned to death the minute they set fire to the bridge. With Confederate Secretary of War Benjamin and Colonel Danville Leadbetter dead set on seeing the men hang, it is doubtful that anything could have changed the final outcome.

MIDWAY, GREENE COUNTY, E. TENN..

February 1, 1867.

Maj. Gen. GEORGE H. THOMAS,
Commanding Department, Louisville, Ky.:

DEAR SIR: I appeal to you for justice, if it is in your power, which I think it is under General Order No. —. Hoping it is in your power to release me, I will give you the particulars, as follows: In November, 1861, my husband and two sons volunteered in the U. S. service, under Capt. David Fry, of the 2d Tennessee Volunteers, commanded by Col. T. P. Carter. They burned some bridges on the East Tennessee and Virginia railroad, and shortly after were captured and taken to Knoxville by the rebels. Some time after they were there in jail, John Baxter, of Knoxville, claiming to be familiar with the rebel authorities, got my husband to give him a deed of trust on some of his lands, for some two or three thousand dollars, claiming that he would have him released, and if he failed he would save that much of his land from confiscation by the rebels, and would save for me and my little children a home. Also I will prove to your satisfaction that he never appeared on the trial when my husband was condemned to be hung. He and one of my sons were hung, and the other one released, and died in a few days after he got home. Now, Mr. Baxter says he must have this amount of money out of the estate. I have nothing but our land left. The rebels took everything we had, and confiscated it when they hung my husband and son. Mr. Baxter says he must have his money, or he will take steps to sell our lands. My husband was not at himself when those notes or deeds of trust were given. I will enclose Mr. Baxter's letter, so you will see what he says to me on the subject. If it is in your power to order him to return the deed of trust or notes to me or my children, I would be thankful to you.

Hoping to hear from you on the subject shortly,

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

MALINDA HARMON,
Wife of Jacob Harmon.

On February 1, 1867, Malinda Harmon, widow of Jacob Harmon, Jr., wrote to General George H. Thomas asking his help to save her land from foreclosure by attorney John Baxter. Published in the Congressional Globe, 20 January 1871. Courtesy Donahue Bible

Remarks of Senator Brownlow before the U.S. Senate, regarding the Malinda Harmon case, on January 19, 1871, published in the Congressional Globe, on January 20, 1871.

The Government failed to carry out its pledge. As a consequence the jails and prisons all along the line of railroad were filled with Union men charged with bridge-burning. Jacob Harmon, an honest and industrious German, and one of his sons, residing in the vicinity where the Lick Creek bridge was burned, were thrown into prison, and soon after hanged at Knoxville. While in prison he executed a mortgage to one John Baxter, of a law firm, upon his farm and home—a valuable little farm, said to be worth \$5,000—with a view to his defense before a drum-head court-martial. The trial before the court-martial was a mockery. The counsel were refused the facilities for defending the prisoners.

Judah P. Benjamin, the rebel secretary of war, and former Senator from Louisiana, publicly issued and printed an order, which I give in his own words, namely:

“That all those implicated in burning the bridges should be tried by drum-head court-martial, and, if found guilty, publicly hanged in the vicinity of the burned bridges; and that their bodies should be left hanging for several days as a warning to the Union men of East Tennessee.”

Among those executed were Jacob Harmon and his son, while another son was thrown into prison and kept there until he died.

Since the close of the war the lawyer referred to has foreclosed the mortgage and sold the farm to pay for his services as a lawyer, of no benefit to his clients, while he secured a shyllock's fee; and the result is that this poor widow, whose husband and two sons died for the Union cause, and whose home has been fraudulently taken from her as a consequence of the loyalty of her protectors, is now destitute and suffering for the necessities of life.

It is to enable her to reclaim her home that this bill provides, and since without hesitation the House has passed this bill, I doubt not the Senate will do the same.

[The Chief Clerk read the above remarks at the request of Mr. BROWNLOW, in consequence of his physical condition disabling him from addressing the Senate.]

[The VICE PRESIDENT. The bill is before the Senate as in Committee of the Whole, and open to amendment. It will be reported in full.]

Senator William G. "Parson" Brownlow appealed the case of Malinda Harmon, widow of Jacob Harmon, Jr., before the U.S. Senate, 19 January 1871. Published in the Congressional Globe, 20 January 1871. Courtesy Donahue Bible.