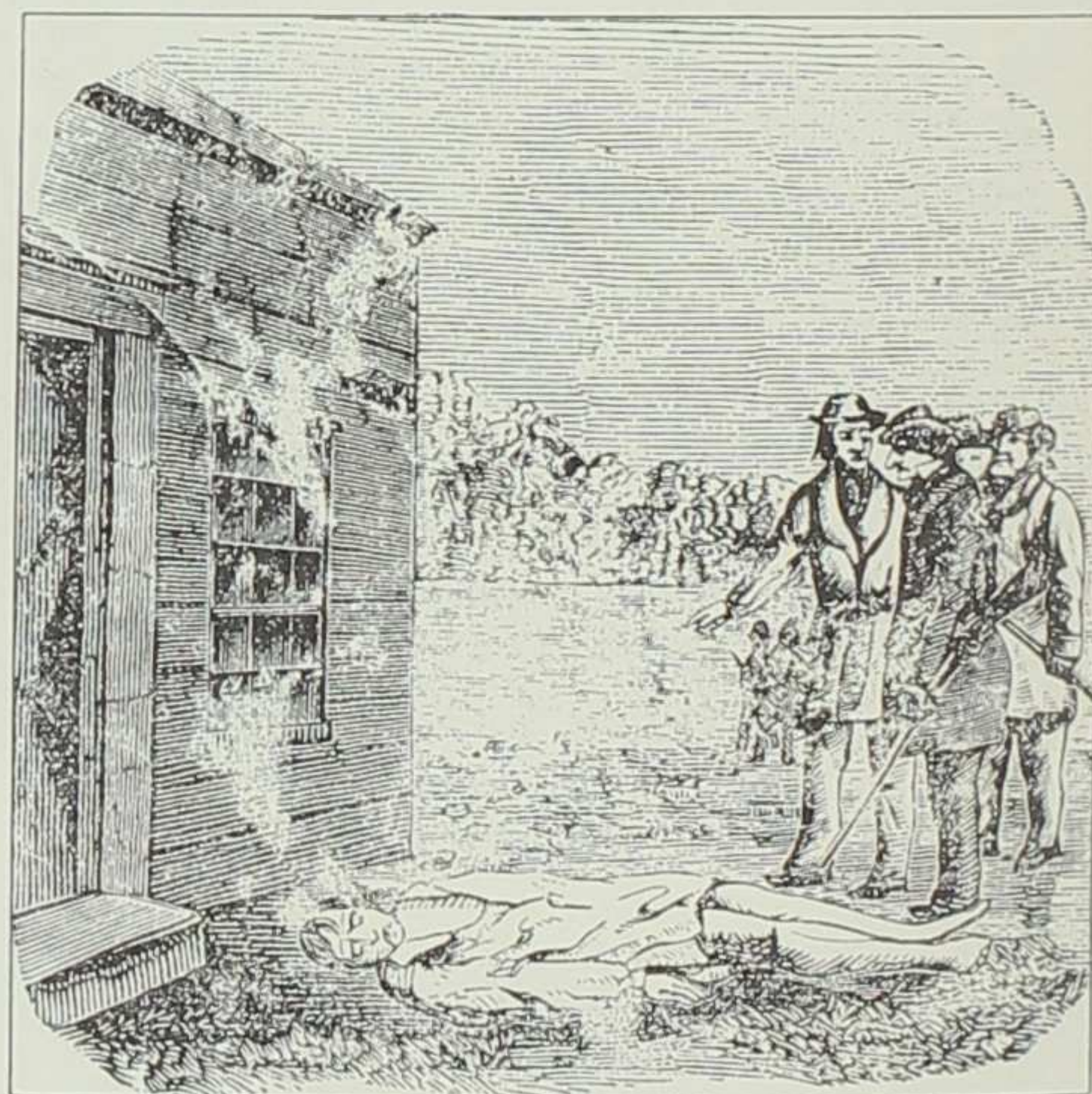
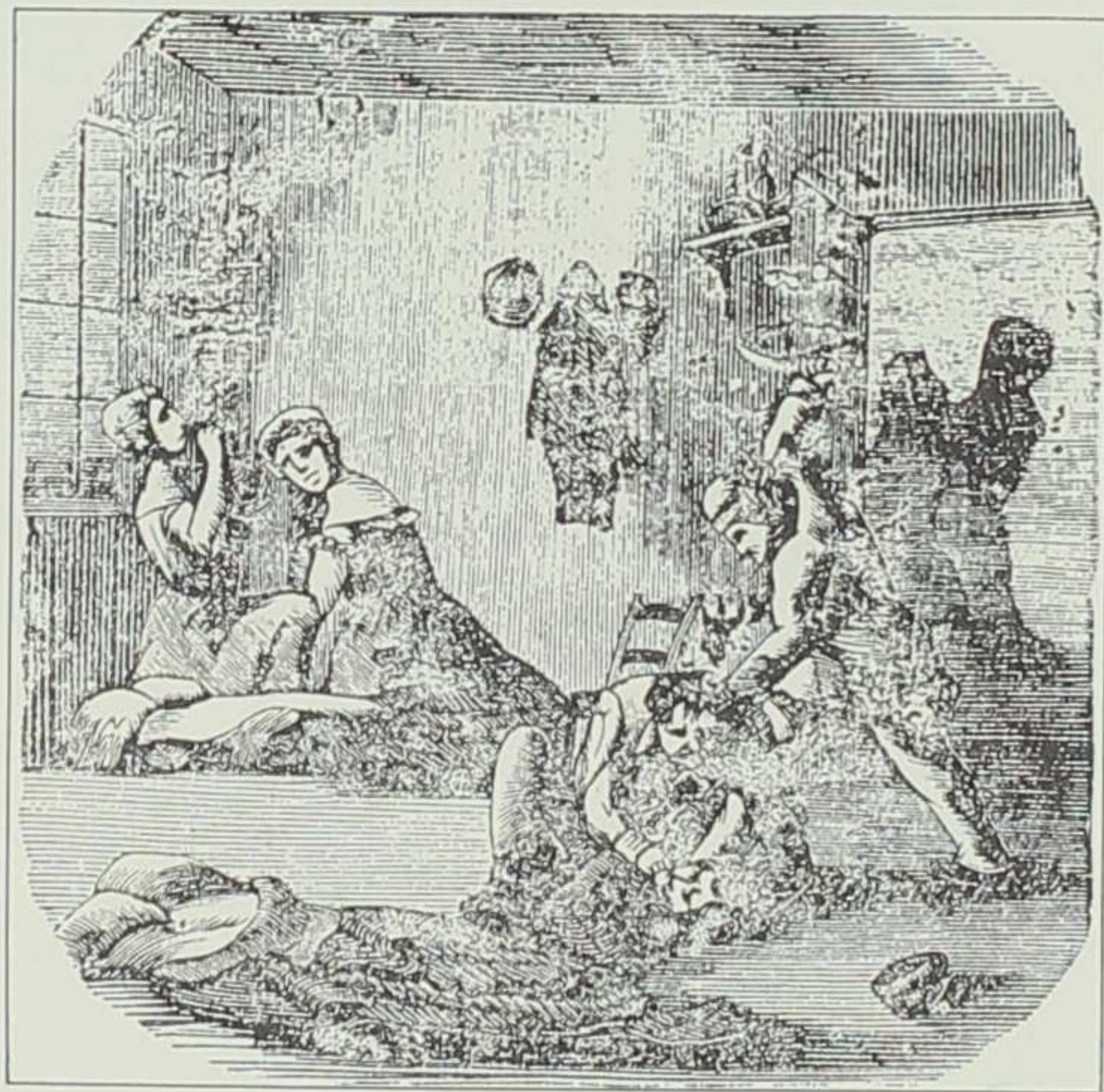


# THE HODGES HANGING



**T**he single-room cabin lay on the outskirts of West Point, Lee County, Iowa, 25 miles from Nauvoo, Illinois. John Miller (Johannes Mueller), a middle-aged German Mennonite preacher, and his family had moved there from Ohio only a short while before. Intending to establish a Mennonite church at West Point, Miller had taken the cabin temporarily, while he looked around for a "good farm." He offered to pay cash for the land during his inquiries, and soon the rumor spread locally that he kept a considerable sum on hand at the cabin. Early in May he held a meeting with area Mennonites, but before he could get to the business of building his flock, before he found his farm and established his congregation, he was murdered.

On May 10, 1845, three men broke into the cabin where Miller and his wife, his two daughters and their husbands Henry Leisi and

Jacob Risser slept. Mrs. Miller awoke to the sound and sight of the break-in — men carrying guns and clubs, their faces blackened in disguise, a single lantern held high. She shook her husband, and one of the men clubbed him. Another lashed out at Leisi. The third stood at Risser's bed, holding his gun on its occupants. Miller leaped from his bed and went for his own gun. He and his attackers fought, and Leisi came to his aid. A revolver went off. Shot, savagely cut and beaten, Leisi crumpled to the floor. The three assailants fled, and Miller chased after them, gun in hand.

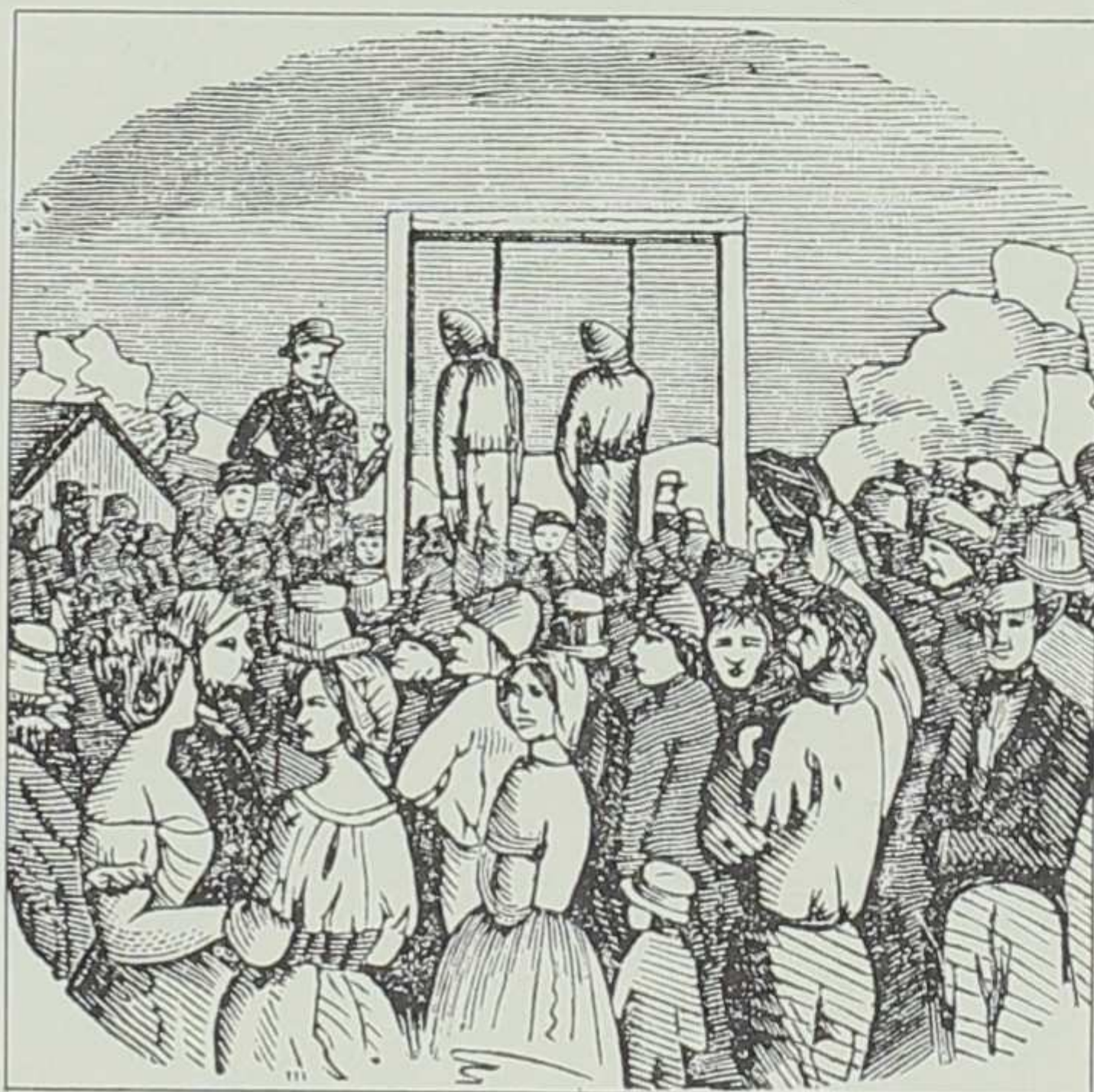
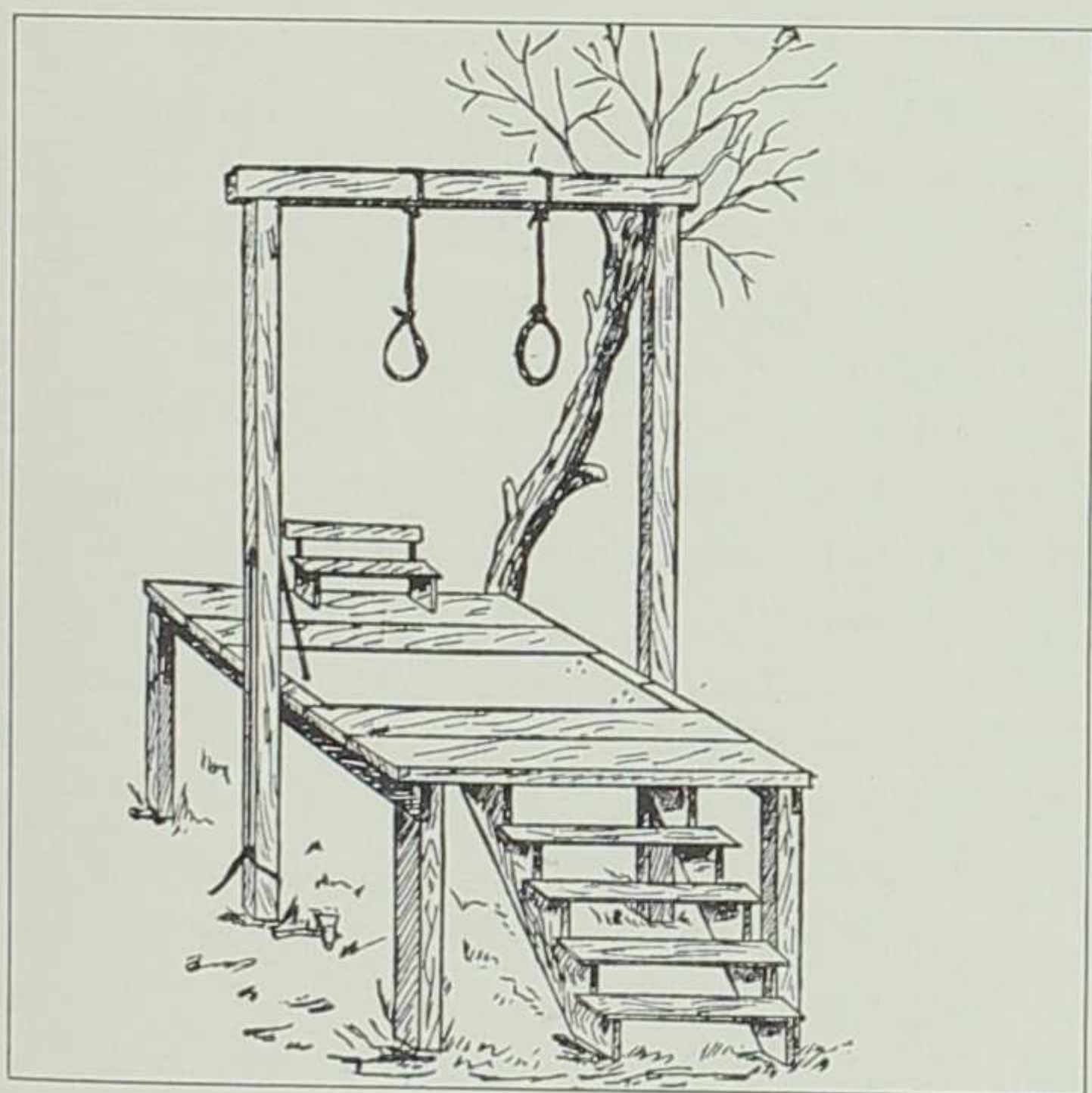
Jacob Risser, out of the bed now, followed close on his father-in-law's heels until he reached the cabin's door, where he was shot at and missed by one of the intruders. When he got outside, the three men were gone, leaving Miller in their wake bleeding — dying — from a stab wound in the chest.

Risser ran for help to the nearest neighbors half a mile away. By early morning Dr. Holmes and James L. Estis, Lee County sheriff,

© 1979 by Barbara Howard and Junia Braby. Adapted from material for a chapter in the authors' book-in-progress about Marietta Walker, sister of the Hodges brothers.



BY BARBARA HOWARD  
JUNIA BRABY



from Edward Bonney's *Banditti of the Prairies, 1856* and the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*

reached the cabin. They found Miller dead and Leisi critically wounded. Dr. Holmes removed a bullet from Leisi's chest, near the shoulder blades, but the man was riddled with stab wounds from both a large, heavy knife, and a very sharp one with a half-inch blade. He died three weeks and two hours later.

There seemed to be no mystery about the murders. The motive, everyone agreed, was robbery, and the survivors identified two of the men who had killed their husbands and father as William and Stephen Hodges. The Hodges family was Mormon, followers of Joseph Smith since the late 1830s. There was reason to suspect that they were Danites, a secret group whose twofold purpose was to protect the Mormon church from outside hostility and internal dissent. A covert organization with a membership alluded to only by others and rarely, if ever, by the actual members, the Danites were reputed to be one of

several frontier groups — “gangs” might be closer — that ranged over the countryside robbing, assaulting, and murdering the local citizenry. Some of the bands were highly organized, while others were no more than a few drifters and desperate men. The Danites, an established band, was the more chilling for venting its malevolence with religious fervor.

The local populace had grown increasingly hostile to the Mormons since the fall of 1844. Leader Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were assassinated by a mob on June 27 of that year. Though the shock of their murder reduced the antagonism briefly, as Robert Flanders notes in *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, this “apparent detente in Mormon-gentile affairs . . . proved temporary.” The antagonism grew to extremes, became feverish, intense.

The Hodgeses were not only Mormons, and suspected Danites, but they were linked to the scene of the crime by three bludgeons and a cap left behind. Edward Bonney, a private detec-



tive, identified the cap as belonging to William Hodges. Suspected as terrorists, professing a religion of strange beliefs and peculiar practices, identified by eyewitnesses, and linked to the killings by physical evidence, the Hodges brothers were arrested and indicted. D.M. Repshire, constable at Nauvoo, arrested William and Stephen Hodges at the home of their brother Amos on May 13, 1845. The third accused man, Thomas Brown, escaped capture and subsequent indictment.

Following their arrest, the three Hodges brothers were taken to the Iowa penitentiary at Fort Madison. Amos was released with no charges against him, and the two others were indicted by the grand jury and returned to jail. Throughout the events that followed, Stephen and William protested their innocence and began to claim the only reason they were being tried was that they were Mormons.

On May 15, 1845 — the day they were indicted — the following appeared in *Times and Seasons*, the official Mormon paper in Nauvoo:

Perhaps we ought to explain our figure of "putting out fires as soon as discovered." By this we mean bad members at home or abroad: those that keep not the commandments of the Lord: grumblers — whiners — adulterers — transgressors; cutting them off is our salvation . . . Since the church began to purify itself the power of God has been manifest. The saints abide, counsel and prosper.

There may be a connection between this statement and the forthcoming denial by the church that the Hodges were Mormon. At any rate, by May 21 the following disclaimer would appear in the *Nauvoo Neighbor*:

We always have and always will help honest men to execute the laws and bring the offenders to justice. Let it be known throughout the land that THESE TWO YOUNG HODGES ARE NOT MORMONS, NOR NEVER WERE.

Feelings around Nauvoo exploded. Part of the increasing violence that terrified the population, the case fed rumors about "secret ter-

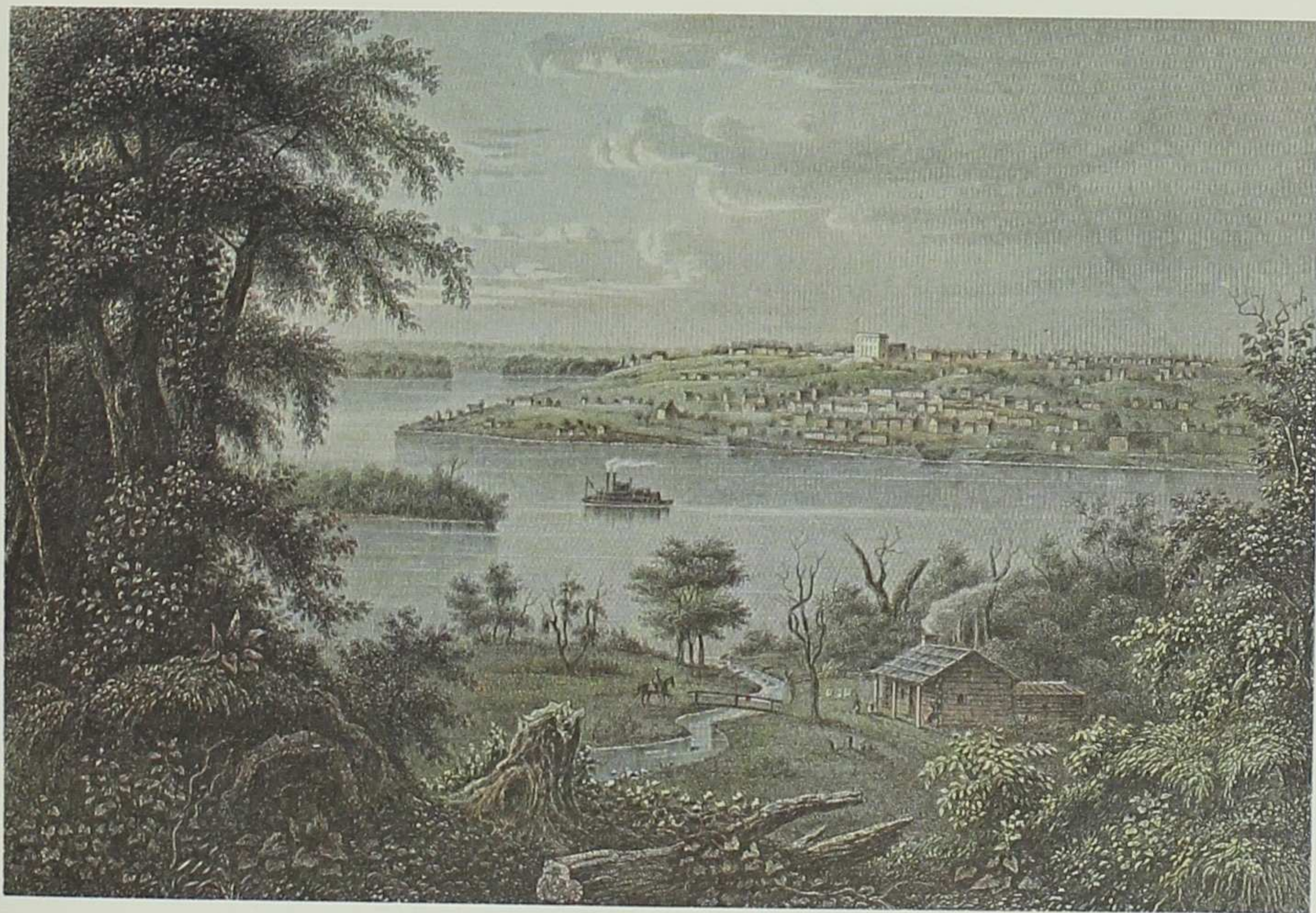
rorist groups" that had been growing in proportion to the crime rate. Local law officers and government officials tried to ease the tension by pointing out that the Mormons alone could hardly be responsible for all the trouble in the territory, but sentiment against the exclusive and arrogant community was too strong. The regional press reflected the sentiment, and those working anxiously for the Mormons' removal in the hopes of ending the violence that accompanied their stay could find solace in the attitudes expressed by newspapers such as the *Sangamo Journal* and the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*. These ranged from reasonable tolerance to a demand for complete annihilation. In such an atmosphere, it is not surprising the *Nauvoo Neighbor's* protestation that the Hodgeses were not even Mormons was scarcely noticed.

Whatever the relationship of the Hodges brothers to the Mormon church, the Nauvoo community could not escape being linked to them. Recognizing the intense anti-Mormon feelings around West Point, their attorneys called for a change of venue. Granted, the change placed the brothers in jail at Burlington, Des Moines County, where the trial was held.

They were moved from Fort Madison by the steam ferry *New Purchase*. According to the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* "a vast crowd assembled at [the] landing on Monday" to witness their arrival. Sheriff Estis and Warden Guthrie gave the prisoners, in shackles, over to the care of Sheriff McKinney, who placed them in Burlington's old jail on the North Hill Public Square. Defense attorneys Hall and Mills, working to obtain witnesses and seeking evidence, unsuccessfully attempted to postpone the trial.

**O**n Monday, June 17, the jury was impaneled and the trial — held in the Methodist church — began on Tuesday. During the trial, things became suddenly less clear





*A hand-colored lithograph of Nauvoo, ca. 1850*

cut, and the brothers' cry that they were scapegoats started to take on some substance. There was hardly any question that Miller and Leisi had been murdered by someone — Dr. Holmes's description of the grisly scene left no room for doubt:

I . . . found old man Miller lying out of doors, he was dead; probed the wound in the breast; could not touch the bottom of the wound with a probe; I think the wound would have gone through the body of an ordinary person. Miller was a man of deep chest, found wound on his forehead and on probing it, found the skull grated on probe, from which I judge that it was slightly fractured. I think the death was caused by the stab wound in the breast . . . There was much blood on the ground, on the door . . . and the walls of the house.

But the rest of it — what had happened at the hands of whom — became questionable. Mrs.

Risser, who had testified that she saw Stephen Hodges in the dimly-lit room and had identified him when he was brought to her home after arrest, identified him again at the trial. But she also admitted "the lights went out shortly after I awoke." Mrs. Miller, too, identified the Hodges brothers, particularly Stephen, but during cross-examination she admitted their blackened faces made the intruders difficult to recognize. "There was much confusion," she said, "and the whole did not last two minutes."

Sheriff Estis testified he had looked for footprints as soon as he arrived at the cabin on the morning after the murder, and he followed such tracks as he found eleven miles to Montrose:

I saw the tracks of Stephen Hodges in Nauvoo and com-

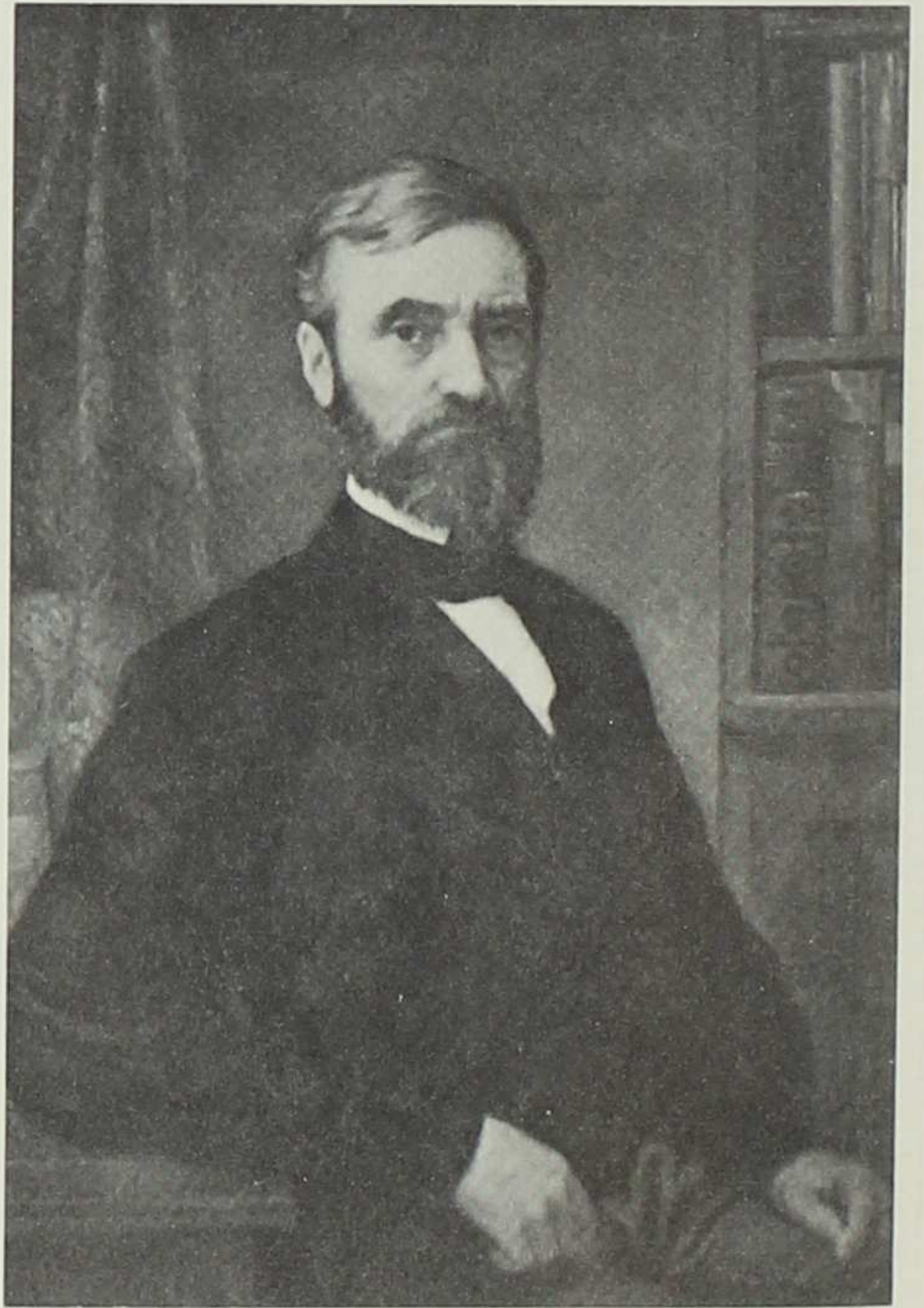


pared it with the tracks leading from Leisi's; I judged it was made by the same boot; he was there in custody; I had showed Col. Patterson the tracks I had traced in Montrose; I saw Stephen Hodges in custody of officers in Nauvoo, as he was walking in the dust of the street. I measured the tracks leading to Montrose but lost the measure; I did not measure the track in Nauvoo; saw tracks in West Point; I think them the same. There are no public roads near Miller's house; it is in the woods, the place where I first found these tracks was the road from the lower crossing of Devil Creek.

Fortunately for the State, there was more linking the Hodgeses to the murder scene than the tracks Sheriff Estis found somewhere else and followed.

The cap identified by Edward Bonney as belonging to William Hodges was introduced into evidence following the Sheriff's testimony. But Bonney was more a bounty hunter than a private detective, and he was an admitted counterfeiter and horse thief, keeping company with the known criminal element in the Iowa river town. Some writers implicitly, and contemporary associates explicitly, attest to Bonney's involvement in marauding gangs and even his indictment once for murder. (Bonney, however, in his book *Banditti of the Prairies*, published in 1856, defends his actions and sincerely argues that he believed the Hodges brothers were guilty.)

The most incriminating evidence came from neither the survivors nor Bonney, but from Miller's neighbors who were also acquaintances of the Hodgeses — Peter Munjar, Thomas Munjar, Armstrong Walker, and John Walker. These men spoke of seeing the brothers, along with Thomas Brown, in the area. They remembered the cap as being similar to the one found at the scene of the crime. John Walker probably gave the most incriminating evidence of anyone. He mentioned that Stephen had been previously accused of robbery. He reported a conversation with William Hodges that suggested the two were part of a gang of thugs including their brothers Ervine and Amos Hodges. Walker told the jury



Judge Charles Mason

that William had been extremely interested in any neighbor who might have large sums of money. And he said William had threatened him if he ever repeated any of the conversation about the gang:

William . . . asked me to join the company and I refused; He said if I ever told about the gang etc. he would take my life or have someone kill me. I first told of it about two weeks ago to Dr. Sala and others . . . Dr. Sala and Mr. Barton came to me and said the citizens thought I know something about the murder, that I would not tell; said citizens would raise a mob and take me if I did not.

Another witness for the prosecution — A. K. Drollinger — testified that not only had he seen weapons in the possession of the Hodgeses and Brown, but that he could con-



firm the cap belonged to Stephen.

The somewhat contradictory testimony of Repshire and the other men who had arrested the brothers followed. Repshire claimed the Hodgeses had resisted arrest, but that "searching them" he "found no arms on them and found none afterwards." That was Monday night. The accompanying officer, a certain D. Davis, testified that he "saw them searched on Tuesday evening, the bright pistol was taken from Stephen, the smaller pistol and bowie knife from Amos, the morning before saw William Hodges with the smaller pistol." Other witnesses — Scott, Stewart, and Belknap — testified they had seen the brothers in possession of knives, pistols, or both at one time or another. In fact, much of the late testimony called by the prosecution indicated the brothers were often armed with knives of various sizes and with guns.

The prosecution also attempted to offer as evidence the dying declaration of Leisi to his wife and his physician that the prisoners were the killers, but the court refused to allow the testimony to go to the jury.

Testimony on behalf of the defendants consisted of several witnesses claiming they had seen the young men in Nauvoo on the night of the crime. Emmaline Hodges, sister of the accused, declared she had made a cap for her younger brother similar to the one found at the scene of the murder, but that the cap had been burned before she moved from Nauvoo some months earlier. Here, as with testimony for the prosecution there were contradictions and conflicting accounts. Running through the testimony the question of Mormonism and its role in the crime was raised in a number of ways, regardless of its relevance to the Hodgeses' guilt.

**T**he jury left the courtroom at 9 p.m. Saturday night to decide on a verdict. By Sunday morning they had reached one, and a

crowd — attracted by the trial and the anti-Mormon sentiment that ran throughout the territory — filled the courtroom. The assembly waited silently, in anticipation, as the jury foreman handed the verdict to the clerk. When he read: "We, the Jury, find William and Stephen Hodges GUILTY of murder," the spectators burst into applause. The brothers sat motionless, expressionless, among the assembly in the Methodist church.

An even larger crowd assembled to hear Judge Mason's sentencing. Given the opportunity to account for himself, William Hodges said, "I have nothing more to say except that I am innocent of the charge; I have had the benefit of a fair trial by a Jury of my country — I have been found guilty and I am prepared to submit myself to my fate." Stephen, too, claimed his innocence.

Judge Mason, with "deep and visible emotion," sentenced the two men. He described the nature of their crime as a "murder . . . which in point of atrocity, may almost be said to be unparalleled in the annals of crime." "You have," he told them ". . . invaded the sacred fountains of life . . . cut off in bloom and maturity of manhood two of their chief supports, drenching their hearth with their life's blood." He laid the burden of the territorial violence at their feet, associating them with the "feeling of apprehension and insecurity . . . communicated to every cottage throughout the country." Consequently, he told them, the law would "apply all there is of remedy within its reach." Talking of his own reluctance to pass the dread sentence of death and "become one of the instruments by which the lives of two human beings are about to be extinguished," he directed them to seek for pardon in the only place they might find it — in "none but your God" — and he urged them to use their last days to repent of their misdeeds. Finally, he ordered that "William and Stephen Hodges be taken from this place to the jail of the County of Des Moines, there to remain until Tuesday,





*Henry Lewis' hand-colored lithograph of Burlington, 1841*

the 15th day of July next, that on that day you will be taken by the proper officer of this County to some convenient place within the same, and there, between the hours of 10 o'clock a.m. and 4 o'clock p.m. that you may be hung by the neck until you are dead; and may God have mercy upon you."

It was the first legal hanging in Des Moines County. Hangings were public events, macabre social affairs featuring music, hymn-singing, speeches, picnics — a kind of communal expiation with a festive air. The fact that it was the first and that it in some ways functioned as retribution against the Mormons, who still denied connection with the Hodgeses, brought out the crowds.

Spectators filled the "convenient place" a hundred yards west of the railroad on Mount Pleasant Street. At the foot of the gallows they jostled for position, each eager for the best view of the hanging. July 15 was a bright warm Tuesday, and the crowd came from all over, from Bloomington and other spots in Illinois, from Fort Madison, from Nauvoo, on the steamers *Mermaid* and *Schokoquan*, on the ferry *Caroline*. Sheriff John McKinney looked toward the event with dread. "I wish I had not to do it," he said, according to the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*. "I would rather than fifty dollars someone else had the job."

At noon Col. George Temple and several companies of riflemen arrived at the jail. Soon, the shackled prisoners, dressed in their shrouds, climbed onto the wagon Temple



brought. Seated on their coffins, they were escorted to the gallows accompanied by a band playing solemn tunes. Sheriff McKinney, his deputy and brother Smith McKinney, Rev. Mr. White of the Cumberland Presbyterian, Rev. Mr. Coleman of the Methodist, Rev. Bishop Loras of the Catholic, and Rev. Mr. Hutchinson of the Congregational churches all sat on the platform along with the two doomed men and a friend who had that day arrived in town.

The many reverends prayed, the crowd sang hymns, and the brothers were allowed to speak. They accused the crowd of religious bigotry and passionately challenged the denials of the Mormon church. Stephen Hodges cried: "You are now putting two innocent men to an ignominious and shameful death. Hang us, we are Mormons!"

As the crowd watched, the two brothers stepped forward. William was the first. A noose was placed around his neck, and as the rope was hung round his brother, he seemed to be praying. Black hoods were drawn over their heads. A line holding up the hinged trapdoor — the drop — was all that stood between them and eternity.

The line was cut. The drop fell.

Years later, Mrs. Etna Mast, one of the crowd, would write: "I was only a little girl then, but I remember . . . for it was two or three weeks before I could banish the horrible scene from my mind." Stephen's neck broke instantly. He died without struggle. But William, whose feet touched an inclined plane as the trap fell, did not. He struggled in agony, drawing up his limbs, relaxing them, drawing them up again, his muscles twitching and his body contorting, until — ten minutes later — he died from strangulation.

**T**he hanging, in some ways, is only the beginning of the story. Though the press showed little sympathy for the dead men,

others felt some trepidation at the execution, not only for the cruelty of the punishment, but also at the possibility there might be virtue in the brothers' claim to martyrdom. One of the men who had been called to jury duty refused to serve because he objected to capital punishment. Judge Mason himself had his doubts and hesitations. "It is," he said as he reluctantly signed the death warrant, "a barbarous, uncivilized and unchristian mode of punishment for crime." He needed reassurance about the trial as well, and the defense attorneys accommodated him with a confidential letter stating that Lydia Hodges, wife of Amos, had refused to testify at the trial because she could not honestly say the men had been in Nauvoo. The defense attorneys felt the two men were guilty. The trial had been fair. But it, like the hanging, like the murder itself, had taken place in the nexus of violence and controversy that surrounded the Mormons and their stay at Nauvoo. Whether the Hodges brothers were guilty or innocent, their story is of a piece with that violence and its implications.

Thomas Brown, the third man accused in the murder, remained at large until he showed up at Mormon Winter Quarters across the Elk Horn River in western Iowa in the company of Return Jackson Redden, Orrin Porter Rockwell, and J.C. Little. Brown was later listed as "Nathaniel Thomas Brown" and was "apparently a church member in good standing until his death." He was killed by an unidentified man at Winter Quarters in 1848.

Again the shadow of Danite involvement appears. Brown accompanied the Hodges brothers on their travels around Nauvoo. He was seen with them near West Point where the murder took place. Brown's friendships with Orrin Porter Rockwell and Return Jackson Redden draws attention to the way legal counsel was secured for the brothers. Return Jackson Redden, along with Amos and Ervine Hodges, William F. Douthier, W. Jenkins



Salisbury, and William Hickman, mortgaged property to raise \$1,000 needed to hire Hall and Mills. Several of these men were known Danites: Hickman, Redden, and probably both Amos and Ervine Hodges. Salisbury, brother-in-law to Joseph Smith, the Latter Day Saint prophet, may have been a Danite. John C. Bennett, who commanded the Nauvoo Legion and had close contact with the militant extremists, wrote about the Hodges brothers' close friendship with William Hickman and Porter Rockwell, both of whom boasted of their role in the Danite organization.

John D. Lee, another self-proclaimed Danite, in his book, *The Mormon Menace*, said, "The members of this order were placed under the most sacred obligations that language could invent. They were sworn to stand by and sustain each other; sustain, protect, defend, and obey the leaders of the church under any and all circumstances unto death." Other information about the terrorist group surfaced in the 1838 court trial of Joseph Smith. Their militant zeal led the group to excesses. They often engaged in acts of "obtaining property from the gentiles" in the "disguise of women's clothing," earning the group the first name it was known by — The Daughters of Zion. The name "Danites" grew from a certain Mormon interpretation of scripture. This interpretation was picked up by Danite leader Sampson Avard, who repeated it in the following speech recorded in Joseph Smith's journal:

Know ye not, brethren, that it soon will be your privilege to take your respective companies and go out on a scout on the borders of the settlements, and take to yourselves spoils of the goods of the ungodly Gentiles: for it is written, the riches of the Gentiles shall be consecrated to my people, the house of Israel; and thus you will waste away the Gentiles by robbing and plundering them of their property; and in this way we will build up the kingdom of God, and roll forth the little stone that Daniel saw cut out of the mountain without hands, and roll forth until it filled the whole earth. For this is the very way that God destines to build up His kingdom in the last days.

Though Avard was excommunicated from the church because of his excesses, the Danite group continued and, by 1845, appeared to be active in and around Nauvoo. Evidence suggests that Ervine Hodges, brother of the condemned men, spent much time in Danite forays, and the night following the sentencing of William and Stephen, *en route* from their trial to his home in Mechanicsville, he "was inhumanely murdered . . . about 35 rods west" of the office of the *Nauvoo Neighbor*.

Ervine's murder bore all the marks of Danite revenge. The *Neighbor* reported:

Mr. Hodges was asked by the bystanders, before he died, if he KNEW WHO HAD STABBED HIM — He answered, "It was, as I supposed, my best friend." This was repeated four or five times, but he refused to give the name till he died.

He was assaulted, beaten with a club, and stabbed by what was probably a bowie knife.

**E**rvine's murderer was never caught. In his memoirs, Joseph Smith III recalled the murder: "As a boy in Nauvoo, I had known William Hickman by sight and remember that on the morning the body of Ervine Hodges was taken from where it had been murdered — on the lawn near the home of Brigham Young, by someone as yet unknown to justice — I had seen him in the curious crowd which followed the body to the Hodges home." William Hickman, one of the men who had raised funds for William and Stephen — and a close associate of Ervine — lived with a reputation as a Danite and a man of violence that followed him throughout his life.

Edward Bonney, the bounty hunter, accused the Mormon leadership of the murder of Ervine Hodges. So did John D. Lee, at whose home Brigham Young was guest the night of Ervine's death. Lee accused the guards outside the Brigham Young home. The cries of agony of the assaulted Ervine were heard by Brigham's





"The Danite Chief" (Culver Pictures)

wife in her home, yet were not acknowledged by those guards. Curiously enough in recording the events of the day in his journal, Young made no mention of the murder, nor is there any mention of the decision to remove the bodies of the Hodges brothers from the Saints' burying grounds a month later. Yet, other crimes in the territory during the year captured his attention and were noted.

Ervine Hodges was killed, but Amos Hodges simply disappeared. No records indicate what happened to the fourth Hodges brother. The only clue to his demise is found in a letter written to the *Sangamo Journal* of November 5, 1846. Dated September 24, 1846, it is from William Smith, who by this time had failed in his attempt to gain leadership of the church in Nauvoo and had become a follower of J.J. Strang, leader of a Mormon splinter group. Smith is scarcely an unbiased judge of the situation in Nauvoo. Removed from any pretension to power by Brigham Young and the Council of Twelve, he vented his hostility on Mormon leaders. Smith accused the Mormon hierarchy of supporting the "doctrine of secret murder to

save the souls of men; as for instance the death of Irvin and Amos Hodges . . . Irvin Hodges was murdered within twelve feet of Brigham Young's door. Amos Hodge was murdered, it is said, between Montrose and Hashway, in Iowa, by Brigham Young's guard, who pretended at the time to escort him out of Nauvoo for his safety, under cover of women's clothes, who then pretended that he had run away."

If, as William Smith suggested, Amos attempted to leave Nauvoo dressed in woman's attire, and was killed by those who accompanied him, this fits the pattern of Danite activity.

There is also no mention in Brigham Young's diary of the decision — noted in the July 23, 1845 edition of the *Nauvoo Neighbor* under the headline "Removal of the Hodges":

By a unanimous vote of the citizens of Nauvoo, the HODGES are to be removed from the grave yard of the saints, to a place to be specially purchased for that purpose.

Following the threads of Danite activity leads to other surprises. On April 1, 1876 an item appeared in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* telling of a find by workmen remodeling an old building in Burlington in March of that year. They discovered "in the tin scroll which surmounted the 'cap' at the head of the water spout a roll of manuscript" confirming the earlier rumor that "a man named A.F. Green was involved in a plot to rescue the Hodges and burn the city if necessary." The paper named several of the then prominent citizens of Burlington who had planned to help carry out the rescue. According to the article: "Among other papers was a commission from the Prophet Jo Smith dated in May, 1844, just before the latter was killed in the Carthage jail, written in parchment in red ink, fully empowering Green in the name of the church, to do a great many things which would now be regarded as unlawful." Shortly after the discovery, the manu-



script was given to the owner of the building and then mysteriously disappeared. No one was ever able to validate the authenticity of the find.

In 1910 an article appeared in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* featuring an interview with Mrs. Mary Hines who claimed that her husband, dead for 16 years, belonged to a gang led by Edward Bonney. Mrs. Hines said her husband told her about the gang in detail after they read the Bonney book. According to the "account" of John Hines, Bonney was playing both sides of the gang game. He received money for turning in members of the gang while he ran the gang itself, since "a detective could never catch any of the gang for they would never talk with a stranger about any of the band." Mary Hines ended the interview with:

My husband has been dead now about sixteen years and I know that what I now tell cannot hurt him. He told me he had made lots of money for Bonney at different times, but that is all past and gone. He was with the gang when they murdered Miller and Liecy and I understand they got a lot of money at that time.

When this article appeared in the *Gazette*, Marietta Walker, sister of the Hodges brothers, contacted Mrs. Hines who swore in

an affidavit that her husband had exonerated William and Stephen.

When I was reading the Bonney book, and came to the names of Stephen and William Hodges, he laughed and said, "Why they were a pack of fools, the Hodge boys were not there at all. I could tell them that much."

I once heard Mr. Hines and George Vrooman, his nephew, have a quarrel at our house, in which they said that George W. Martin assisted Mr. Hines in the murder of Miller and Liecy, but I never heard them mention any third man.

Further information about the hanging appeared in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* January 25, 1914. A letter was found in a trunk in a Burlington home written by a young woman who was a witness to the hanging 69 years before. This letter was accompanied by an article by Henry Smith who also reported from firsthand experience. Smith's account of the hanging is more elaborate than the contemporary newspaper accounts. He described the gallows, and a sketch appeared with his article. The young woman's letter itself does not name the brothers, but describes in vivid detail the event. The letter does mention that a man named Alfred Green was one of the people in the company who watched the hanging with her. Is Alfred Green the A.F. Green whose documents workmen found in the water spout in 1876?

The possibilities are fascinating, but they remain only possibilities. The huge Mormon colony at Nauvoo, like the frontier itself, has vanished into Iowa's history, leaving tantalizing traces of its troubled existence. What is clear is that the violence of the frontier and the violence accompanying the Mormon settlement were reciprocal. The Danite call to violence against the gentiles and the prejudicial atmosphere of the society that tried and hanged the Hodges brothers mirror each other. Not guilt and innocence, but group assault and communal retribution are the keys to the significance of their story, one that tells something of the roots of violence in our culture. □

#### Note on Sources

Much of the information for this article was obtained from accounts in issues of the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* published during the time of the trial and execution. The journal of Judge Charles Mason was also helpful as was the *Sangamo Journal* from the period.

Particular help was given by the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah, which made available a copy of the Hancock County Book of Mortgages listing the names of the men who raised money for the defense attorneys. The Library-Archives of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Independence, Missouri also provided original documents including the affidavit of Mary Hines.