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Wisconsin’s Lynching History: 1861 – 1875

By Megan M. Beer-Pemberton

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Wisconsin’s Lynching History: 1861 – 1875

By

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The University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, 2016
Under the supervision of Dr. Selika Ducksworth-Lawton

In the span of fourteen years, between 1861 and 1875, a total of eight lynchings took place in Wisconsin. Of the eight individuals who were lynched, all were men; one African American, one Native American and the remaining whites. Based on the ethnicity of the victims one can surmise the lynchings that took place during this period were not solely based on the race of the victim: the six lynchings of white men were carried out by fellow whites. The existing literature and research on lynchings focuses primarily on the southern United States. It has not been until recently that historians have begun to shift their focus to other regions. This thesis examines the lynchings that took place in this fourteen-year period in Wisconsin history specifically comparing the circumstances of each event to other regions of the Midwest and South. The research analyzes the ethnicity, ethnic culture, people and environments to answer the question: is Wisconsin lynching history unique?

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Introduction:

Mark Twain once wrote “this epidemic of bloody insanities usually fosters images of baying hounds and armed whites chasing black men across moonlit swamps...the horror of lynching manifesting some of the deepest, most tenacious prejudices held by Americans.”

According to Merriam-Webster lynching is defined as “to kill someone illegally as punishment for a crime” or “to put to death (as by hanging) by mob action without legal sanction”. ¹ There are many words associated with lynching that describe the same type of act with similar outcomes. These include extra-legal: “not regulated or sanctioned by law”, vigilante: “a member of a volunteer committee organized to suppress and punish crime summarily (as when the processes of law are viewed as inadequate; self-appointed doer of justice; frontier justice: extrajudicial punishment that is motivated by the nonexistence of law and order or dissatisfaction with justice; summary execution: an execution in which a person is accused of a crime and immediately killed without benefit of a full and fair trial.

The common theme between all of these concepts is that they describe the act of punishing an individual, or individuals, outside the confines of the established code of law. When one speaks of lynching in the United States more often than not thoughts of the Deep South and the African American victims who were lynched by fellow white

citizens come to mind. The lynchings of African Americans in the South, specifically the post-bellum South, by whites were usually committed because of race and the desire of southern whites to keep the African American populace from progressing. However, lynching was not isolated to just the South.

Phillip Dray describes lynching in his book *At the Hands of Persons Unknown* in the early eighteenth century as referring to a nonlethal summary punishment such as tarring and feathering or flogging. In the late nineteenth century it meant the summary execution by a mob of an individual who had committed an alleged crime or perceived transgression of social codes. Determining who and what type of person took part in lynchings was made difficult by the fact that those who carried out extralegal punishments were pointedly anonymous. This helped to protect those who participated from arrest and prosecution and symbolic, in that the lynching was seen as a conservative act, a defense of the status quo; lynching was an expression of the community’s will.

Lynching, as it will be described within the context of this paper, describes those acts within the state of Wisconsin between the years of 1861 and 1875. In the confines of this fourteen-year period, eight lynchings occurred. Of the eight lynched individuals all were men; one African American, one Native American and the remaining white. Based on the ethnicity of the victims one can surmise that the lynchings that took place during this period were not solely based on the race of the victim: the six lynchings of white men were carried out by fellow whites. The existing literature and research on lynchings outside of the South, specifically the upper Midwest, is sparse, and does not address the

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3 Ibid., xi.
fact that lynchings had less to do with labor and race but more to do with culture, social control and power. The lynchings in Wisconsin deserve a deeper analysis to compare them to what was happening on a much broader scale nationally and, as a result, provide a more thorough understanding of this specific era in Wisconsin history.
Chapter One

Historiography of Lynching in the United States, Midwest, and Wisconsin

Lynching is not unique to the United States alone, having occurred throughout the world, but there are unique characteristics to American lynching. The most notable of the regions to be plagued by this epidemic was the American South. The South is the most researched by historians of lynching. Mob violence became a pervasive and chronic feature of southern life; a prominent feature of race relations in the South that symbolized black oppression. Lynching came to define the southern distinctiveness every bit as much as the Mason-Dixon Line marked the boundary of the region.⁴ The literature and research that exists on lynchings in the United States mostly been focused on lynchings in the southern United States in the late and early twentieth century with some focus on the western states and territories. In contrast, lynching and extralegal violence in the Midwest, specifically Wisconsin, has gone fairly unexamined.

As the topic of lynching has been researched, the American South has set the tone of what defines lynching and the reasons for it. However, those rationales do not necessarily line up with why lynching occurred in other regions of the country. Race was not always the defining reason behind the lynching event outside of the South. Though much of the lynching in the South resulted from race relations, in other areas of the

country ethnicity, lack of faith in the justice system and the want for power fostered the need for some use lynching.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine secondary sources on lynching. Lynchings in the South provide a basis of comparison in Wisconsin. The most notable author of lynchings in the Midwest is Michael J. Pfeifer. Pfeifer’s research on lynching in the Midwest focuses on the differences and similarities of the Midwest has with the South and West. This chapter will be to provide an understanding of how historians have treated the topic of lynching in the United States, specifically the South and the Midwest.

In his book, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America*, Manfred Berg studied the history of lynching beginning with the colonial era in America to the present day. Racism most often was the fundamental component of many lynchings. This was especially true in the postbellum South where African Americans were the most frequent victims of lynchers. However, Berg focused on other minority groups who were victims of lynching such as Mexicans, Chinese, and Native Americans. Berg asserted that that those who initiated lynching saw themselves as vigilantes, representing popular sentiment and standing in opposition to an illegitimate state power that could not be trusted to act swiftly or justly.

Berg suggested that lynchings originated with Colonel Charles Lynch of Bedford County, Virginia, and is the most likely namesake of the practice of punishment outside the law. The colonial frontier played a key role in shaping the American tradition of vigilantism. The “communal and ritualistic character of capital punishment in colonial North America bears significant implications for the history of lynching in a later age.

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Although public executions were infrequent events, they never the less epitomized deep-seated ideas of popular justice as part of a larger moral and religious universe. The use of the death penalty thus satisfied people’s need for swift and harsh justice for serious crimes as well as their claim to an active role in the community. At the end of the chapter Berg uses a quote from historian Richard Maxwell Brown: “perfected during the revolutionary epoch were techniques of civil violence that Americans put to frequent use in later centuries. In the realm of ideas the concept of popular sovereignty emerged as powerful rationale for extralegal violence against those deemed to be enemies of the public good.”

This quote was a common excuse for this. Citizen use of lynching was most often race-based; it was a method of social control and power used by a majority on those who were “outside the fringes” of the social order. As Berg moved through American history he focused on the use of lynching as a form of terror used against black communities in the postbellum South. Lynching was used as a means of racial control by Southerners, and as with all forms of terror, the ever-present threat sent a powerful message of intimidation. This was also true for Mexican and Chinese immigrants as Berg later describes. Berg concludes his book with the fight against lynching and the transition from lynching to hate crimes - a valid point about the legacy of lynching in the United States:

Though Americans repudiate lynching as a national disgrace...while racism is officially `discredited in the multicultural society of the twenty-first century...some legacies of lynching linger on with support among many Americans. First the US maintains the most draconian criminal justice system in the western world epitomized by the death penalty and highest incarceration rate...secondly no other western nation entertains such a wide ranging tolerance

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6 Ibid., 8.
7 Ibid., 22.
for private violence including a broad concept of legitimate self-defense and unrestricted access to firearms.\textsuperscript{8}

Berg’s work provides a foundation for my research and historical background on the emergence of extralegal justice in America.

Ashraf H. A. Rushdy provides more background and insight on the origins of lynching in America in his work entitled “\textit{American Lynching}”. Rushdy revealed how lynching in America endured, evolved, and changed in meaning over the course of three centuries, from its origins in early Virginia to the present day. Rushdy argued that we can understand what lynching means in America by examining its evolution specifically looking at how the practice has changed in both form and meaning, analyzing the rationales of its advocates in its defense and explaining its origins. Rushdy believes that “the best way of understanding what lynching has meant in different times and for different populations, during the course of American history, is by seeing both the continuities in the practice and particular features in different forms of lynching in different eras.”\textsuperscript{9}

To accomplish this Rushdy began by breaking down the meaning of the word lynching and its definition. Rushdy argued that “given the range of events that the word lynching has been used to designate, the political agendas behind the definition of the term and the other myriad problems in trying to come to a working definition it is tempting to embrace the ambiguity of the term.”\textsuperscript{10} Instead he suggested that much of what we understand about the history and dynamics of lynching depended on how we

\textsuperscript{8} Berg, 194.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 5.
define it and we cannot become complacent with the dominant, undeclared, definition. Thus he proposed two definitions that he called “capacious and specific”. The capacious definition “distinguishes lynching from other kinds of social violence, murder, dueling, rioting and so on”\textsuperscript{11} The second term, specific, “distinguishes one sort of lynching from another, usually not always based on the historical moment in which we find those lynchings.”\textsuperscript{12}

Rushdy believed these definitions will “allow us to see both the large scale evolution and the distinct species of lynching in American history.”\textsuperscript{13} This distinction in the definition of the term lynching is vital. The term “lynching” at different times in American history meant differing historical acts among the differing regions and populations who utilized extralegal violence. As Rushdy points out “the term has been used to designate acts that demonstrate a wide range of diverse motives, strategies technologies and meanings.” Clarifying the term allows historians to distinguish lynching from other forms of violence.

Besides reshaping the way we use the term lynching Rushdy arranged his book into three central chapters organized by period. He explained how the practice of lynching developed: “the practice of lynching developed in tandem with the new settlements, ultimately becoming a weapon of terrorism used to control the mobility of particular groups…defined along ethnic, racial or class lines.”\textsuperscript{14} Rushdy provides a unique perspective and new ideas about the nature and origins of racial lynching and the nature of lynching as an American cultural phenomenon.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{14} Rushdy, 39.
Lynching, is generally associated with the southern United States. Between 1880 and 1930 lynch mobs in the American South murdered nearly four thousand people, the vast majority of whom were African American.\textsuperscript{15} Because this research focuses on lynchings in Wisconsin, it is important to compare other regions of the United States where lynching occurred with the South for similarities and differences. Were the motivators for lynching in the South the same as in Wisconsin? W. Fitzhugh Brundage’s book \textit{Under the Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South} provides such a context. Brundage brings together a series of essays that examine the topic of lynching in the South. The contributors cover a range of material and draw from a number of scholarly disciplines such as sociology. They define the term lynching in various ways, some choosing to include nonlethal episodes in the category.

In his introduction Brundage provided historical background and context for lynching in the South. He states “lynching was a powerful tool of intimidation that gripped black’s imaginations whether they lived in a mob-prone part of the South or in the relative safety of a border state.”\textsuperscript{16} The threat of the violence of lynching was an active fear of black Americans during the late nineteenth century. This fear may not have existed in other areas outside of the region. Brundage provided background for the rise of the use of lynching in the South that gives insight as to why it was utilized.

Brundage traced the origination of extralegal violence in the South and how it escalated to become a part of the southern code of honor. Abolitionists claimed that southern extralegal violence could be traced to the region’s debased traditions and institutions. Slavery was one such institution. Slavery at once perpetuated and

\textsuperscript{15} Brundage, 4.  
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 2.
strengthened a peculiarly southern code of honor; a code that at its core claimed to be a defense of white feminine virtue, the very symbol of white racial purity. This code required white men respond to challenges to their honor. These challenges came in the form of black men and their supposed predation of white women thus necessitating the need for Southern white men to act outside the law. However, Southerners professed that lynchers defended, rather than endangered, civilization by protecting it against the threat of slave revolts and abolitionist sedition. The southern code of honor was a legitimate code of conduct in a society that venerated virtue, courage and community standing; white Southerners believed they were upholding a rich a sacred tradition that stretched back centuries.\(^\text{17}\)

Brundage’s analysis provides a basis for comparing the origin of lynchings in Wisconsin to those in the South. It is important to understand how participants justified their actions with use of extralegal justice. In the South it was to uphold a southern code of honor. In the upper Midwest it was for reasons that will be laid out later in this paper. Brundage’s use of essays from other historians and in other fields, such as sociology allows a broader comparative approach to lynching.

As Brundage’s book made clear, race was a defining factor in the lynchings that occurred in the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. James Madison’s book *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* is also about race. He states: “this is a book about race. It masquerades as a book about lynching.”\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 3.
Lynching in the Heartland is the story of the Town of Marion, Indiana, and the lynching of two black men, Tom Shipp and Abe Smith, by a white mob in 1930.

This book demonstrates that mob violence occurred in every region of the nation. Madison makes it clear that the lynching was a predictable consequence of the northern version of Jim Crow segregation present in Marion, Indiana. Madison’s goal is to not only tell the story of the lynching victims but to raise questions about historical memory and follow the trail of shifting interpretations and diverse meanings from the time of the lynching to present day: “this book is about those memories, how they got made, how they changed, how they grew stronger and some faded as times and people changed.” Madison’s book illustrates how people’s perception of an event can be biased based on their beliefs or interpretations of an event.

Madison reiterates that lynching in the South “was a performance that sent a message of white supremacy, warning all blacks to stay in their place. It was a weapon of terror that could strike anywhere, anytime against any African American.” Madison gives a brief history of lynching in the Midwest starting in 1880, referencing well-known cases such as the Duluth lynching, but it is his analysis of Grant County, Indiana, that is poignant: “it’s tempting to think of the mob that lynched Abram Smith and Tom Shipp as ignorant rednecks, fanatical racists, or unwashed Ku Klux Klan Klanners; such simple labels help separate the bad from the good Americans and comfort those who abhor evil

19 Madison, 2.
20 Ibid., 14.
such as lynching. Madison emphasizes that this area is like many others in the Midwest: ordinary. Though he does discuss the Klan and how it was active in Indiana, it is an interesting point to make: lynching did not happen in the remote parts of the Deep South, in seclusion, far away. Lynchings happened in the most “ordinary” or “normal” places in the US. Madison makes it clear that the lynching spirit was more universal than regional; it was ordinary, and the rhetoric and storytelling that justified it pervaded all regions of the country.

Thus far the sources analyzed have provided background information on the origins of lynching in the United States, specifically focusing on the South, as this is the location for the majority of lynchings that took place in the nation. This analysis included a source from James Madison that focused on a particular case of extralegal violence in the Indiana that had similar traits to lynchings that occurred in the South. For the remaining portion of the chapter analysis will focus on sources from historian Michael Pfeiffer, whose work is foundational for studying mob violence in the Midwest. Outside of the South, his work is the standard for comparison. To provide context for Pfeiffer’s argument, background of Wisconsin’s ethnic history is needed. This work adds needed nuance to Pfeiffer’s argument.

During the fourteen-year span between 1860 and 1875 the population and ethnic background within Wisconsin was growing and changing. The number of foreign-born rose from 106,000 in 1850 to 277,000 in 1860. The German born proportion increased from thirty-six percent in 1850 to forty-five percent in 1860. In 1860 124,000 German-born, first generation children of immigrant German parents making up a considerable

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21 Ibid., 27.
portion of the 499,000 native born; with approximately 50,000 Irish born in 1860. In 1870 Wisconsin had a population of just over one million; only one in five lived in an urban place (over 2,500), altogether 207,099. Of that urban 207,099, one in three lived in Milwaukee. There were only eleven other cities of over 5,000 in population. As the nineteenth century progressed, in addition to the Irish, German, and Norwegian immigrants increasing numbers of Finns, Danes, Italians, Swedes, Belgians, Swiss, Bohemians, Czechs and Poles came to call Wisconsin home.

While lynchings remain a southern phenomenon in popular memory in *Lynching beyond Dixie: American Mob Violence outside the South* Michael Pfeifer assembled ten essays that reflect historians’ gradual shift from the well-known period of southern lynchings, 1880s through 1930s, and included essays that cover a wider geographic, chronological and thematic take on the topic. The essays are organized by region starting with the West, Midwest, and the Northeast.

Pfeifer explained that few historians focus “on the lesser, but nonetheless significant, amounts of lynching violence that occurred in American regions outside the South where hundreds of persons, including Hispanics, whites, African Americans, Native Americans and Asians died at the hands of lynch mobs.” Pfeifer’s goal in writing this book is to contribute a more comprehensive history of American lynching that shifts the focus beyond the South and illuminate the similarities and differences between lynchings in the West, Midwest, and Mid-Atlantic.

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23 Ibid., 242.
Pfeifer argues that America’s early criminal justice system did not have a strong, centralized, national state government that could enforce the law but instead “developed along a distinctive path that emphasized local authority and opinion, self-help, and ad hoc law enforcement practices and the toleration of extralegal violence which included lynching."25 This “rough justice”, according to Pfeifer, was based on the local opinions of race, ethnicity, class, honor, gender, and crime control.

In the section of Beyond Dixie that examines the Midwest, Pfeifer suggests that many of the lynchings that took place in the region were racially motivated. The lower Midwest shared a cultural and political borderland with the South which included a shared racial prejudice towards African Americans. Whites lynched seven African Americans in the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois from 1871 through 1877.26 The upper Midwest, populated with Germans, Yankees, and Scandinavians, saw less violence; but between Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota half of the seven victims in Michigan were African Americans and nearly a third in Minnesota were Native American.27 If this is the case Wisconsin is unique in that the lynchings that occurred in the state between 1861 and 1875 were majority white, Thus the possibility lies that they were more ethnically based acts of violence instead of race-based.

Pfeifer echoes the same racial argument in his article The Northern United States and the Genesis of Racial Lynching: the Lynching of African Americans in the Civil War Era. After the Civil War the rebuilding of the nation was a national process, not just a southern one. All citizens, including those in the west and north, had to adapt to the

25 Ibid. 3.
26 Ibid. 8.
27 Ibid.,8-9.
changes in their social, political and economic activities including the acceptance of emancipation and the extension of rights to African Americans. This transformation during and after the Civil War was “a complex fitful process with interconnected local, regional, and national dimensions; violence, including collective violence of lynching and vigilantism”, and that it “was an important aspect of this process, a way to resist the dynamics of change.”

The response to these changes created friction among the working class whites of the north, specifically the Irish Catholics, who had to compete with African Americans for social status and jobs on the lowest rungs of northern society. Thus Irish Catholic communities in the north enacted “homicidal collective violence that sought to avenge Irish kinfolk victimized by alleged African American criminality.”

Pfeifer makes a strong argument for race-based mob violence and specifically references the only known case in Wisconsin of a lynching of an African American. In September of 1861 an African American man was lynched by a mob of Irishmen. The mob was after Marshall Clarke, the victim, because he and another African American gentleman, James Shelton, had exchanged blows with two Irishmen, Darby Carney and John Brady. The Irishmen took offense to the two African Americans’ interaction with a white woman. According to reports during the altercation Shelton fatally stabbed Carney. Shelton was able to escape the mob but Clarke was not and he was lynched. In the reports after the murder many commentators and witnesses to the act cited the role of race in the lynching of Clarke. This is the only example of an African American racially motivated lynching in the State of Wisconsin. Pfeifer also uses this example in his book Roots of

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Rough Justice as an example of Irish bred mob violence in the Midwest, "the racial lynchings performed by Irish Americans evinced profound ethnic solidarity, seeking to avenge crimes against countryman; in the larger context of the Irish community’s familiarity with Old World practices of communal violence and its perception of its marginalization in American public life." It is possible that Irish racial prejudice was the significant factor in the lynching of Clarke in Milwaukee, but does not fit the same context as the other lynchings in Wisconsin. It indicates that Wisconsin’s lynchings may be significantly different than what was happening nationally or even in the Midwest.

Pfeifer seems to take two different paths when describing the history of lynching in the Midwest. His argument has been based on racially motivated mob violence specifically regarding the Irish. However, in his article Wisconsin’s Last Decade of Lynching, 1881-91: Law and Violence in the Postbellum Midwest Pfeifer takes a different approach, suggesting that “violence flowed from a contentious conflict over criminal justice that pitted rural and working class advocates of ‘rough justice’ against urban and middle class supporters of due process.” Those who supported lynching argued for a harsher punishment for crimes such as homicide taking into account factors such as the gender, generation, social status or maliciousness of the murder victim. Those who supported lynching had a profound suspicion in what they considered the unpredictable nature of due process. Pfeifer contends that Wisconsin citizens who were against lynching were middle class and lived in towns and cities stressing the importance of due process and social order.

30 Pfeifer, "Northern United States," 634.
Pfeifer splits his argument in two by referencing the ethnic solidarity and nativism that influenced the response to collective violence in Wisconsin history. Lynchings in Wisconsin in the 1880s usually evoked a mixture of opinions underlining cultural divisions over the changing nature of criminal justice. It was not until the aggressive action of law enforcement to outwit Lynchers was there an end to the practice of mob killing in Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{32} This split of opinion leads me to believe we need a more thorough investigation of the Wisconsin Lynchings. Were the Lynchings based on ethnic solidarity or was it rural working class versus urban middle class?

This sentiment of rural working class versus urban middle class is echoed in Pfeifer’s book \textit{Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947}. His central argument is that lynching was part of a broader cultural war between Americans who privileged due process and those who wanted community-based, quick, and violent retribution against criminals. As Pfeifer states: “to dismiss the relationship between lynching, law and the death penalty is to ignore a debate that constantly ignited Midwesterners, Westerners, and Southerners, as well as Lynchings first historians.”\textsuperscript{33}

When referencing Wisconsin, Pfeifer argued that unlike Iowa and other states of the lower Midwest, in Wisconsin the practice of lynching was never deeply embedded in the state chiefly because of “a culture rooted in Yankee heritage of the state’s most influential citizens and an economy characterized by vibrant capitalism meant that respect for due process law and the promise of social and economic order were strong.

\textsuperscript{32} Pfeifer, \textit{Wisconsin’s Last Decade}, 235.
counter current to Judge Lynch." He argues that with the abolition of the death penalty in 1853, Wisconsin was a leader in legal reforms rooted in humanitarianism. However, the state was not immune to lynching and Pfeifer specifically points out Western Wisconsin. The key point to take away from this book and the analysis Pfeifer provides is that rural and working class Lynchers clearly had not embraced the idea of a rational, detached, sterile legal process as advanced by urban class reformers opening up the debate whether or not the death penalty should be restored in the state.

In order to flesh out the arguments that Pfeifer made in Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947 he published a prequel to his work entitled The Roots of Rough Justice: Origins of American Lynching. Pfeifer’s goal is to fill in the gaps in American lynching historiography and expand past the traditional scholarly research done on lynching that mainly focuses on the South. In this book he seems to meld the argument from the article The Northern United States and the Genesis of Racial Lynching: The Lynching of African Americans in the Civil War Era and Rough Justice that lynching was a reaction to a distrust in the due process of the law and racial grievances amongst Irish Catholics using the case of the lynching of Clarke in Milwaukee as an example.

Pfeifer’s work will be a useful tool when examining the lynchings occurring in Wisconsin during the period of 1861-1875. His work is a good place to start and provides invaluable background knowledge to help analyze these cases of lynching. Pfeifer’s work is considered new in the realm of lynching research because it takes us outside the confines of the traditional work in the South and expands the geographic

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34 Ibid., 27.
region that lynching occurred. My work expands on Pfeifer’s and offer a more detailed analysis of Wisconsin’s lynching history.

The resources that have been discussed, in addition to many other scholarly works on the topic of lynching, will be used to support the thesis of this paper and analyze the research. The sources chosen will provide a basis of understanding of the history of lynching in the United States and why it seems that Wisconsin lynchings had unique characteristics. This material provides the background knowledge of Southern lynchings where the majority of mob violence in the United States occurred and sets a constant in which to compare other regions. Finally, Pfeiffer’s work provides a jumping off point to focus attention and gain a thorough understanding of Wisconsin’s unique lynching history. These sources will help expand the conversation on lynching in the Midwest and bring light to a topic that is uncomfortable for many to discuss but that needs to be addressed.
Chapter Two

The Lynchings

- **September 6, 1861, Marshall Clark, Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI.**
  
  On the night of September 6, 1861, violence erupted in the City of Milwaukee leaving two men dead: one the result of a fight and the other the result of a lynching.

  The accounts of the lynching tell variations of what occurred that evening. One account comes from a book entitled *History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from Prehistoric Times to the Present* published in 1881. The book described the events of the evening of September 6 as two African American men, Marshall Clarke and James Shelton, were walking down Michigan Avenue in Milwaukee. When they turned off Michigan Avenue onto Milwaukee Avenue they met two Irishman, Darbey Carney and John Brady. One account noted that Darbey Carney was a “noted character of the Third Ward.”[35] An altercation followed during which Carney was terribly cut in the abdomen and Brady received a bad slash in the shoulder. Clarke and Shelton, referred to at this point in the 1881 account as the “negroes”, escaped from the scene but not before they “cut a lamplighter named Ellis, whom they encountered”. Carney would succumb to his injuries later that evening. According to the 1881 account:

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[35] **History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from Pre-historic times to the Present Date, Embracing a Summary Sketch of the Native Tribes, and an Exhaustive Record of Men and Events for the past Century; Describing, the City, Its Commercial, Religious, Educational and Benevolent Institutions, Its Government, Courts, Press, and Public Affairs; and including Nearly Four Thousand Biographical Sketches of Pioneers and Citizens,** (Chicago, IL: Western Historical, 1881), 299.
rumors had been prevalent that in case of his death an attempt would be made to take
the assailant from the jail, but tours through the ward made by the officers could
discover no undue excitement and at Carney’s house nothing was to be seen or heard
which would warrant the belief that such an attempt was contemplated."

During the evening the City Attorney and Jailer visited Carney and took his “ante-
mortem statement” which was to the effect that the lighter colored of the two negroes,
Shelton, had done the cutting. Not long after Carney died an alarm was reportedly rung
in the lower part of the city. It is assumed that this alarm was meant as a rallying cry for
the mob and a warning for those who did not want to be involved. The mob began to
make their way from the lower part of the Third Ward toward the jail. It is estimated that
the mob numbered between two and three hundred. In the 1881 account the mob goers
armed themselves with pistols, knives, stones, billets of wood, hammers, or “anything
that they could get their hands on that could be laid at a moment’s notice”.

The jail was patrolled that evening by Jailer William Kendrick and his assistants,
as well as the Chief of Police, William Beck. Beck had originally retired for the evening
but upon hearing of the mob, returned to the jail and waited at the front door for them to
arrive. Ahead of the mob two policeman, Smith and Thomas, arrived to support the Chief
of Police. When the mob arrived at the jail they warned Beck to get out of the way, that
they did not want to hurt him, but Beck declined and told the mob leaders they were not
to enter the jail. Beck was struck on the head and knocked down. The two policeman
were escorted out of the way. The mob advanced into the jail and confronted Jailer
Kendrick. Kendrick was struck in the face and told to open the door; Kendrick refused.
The mob backed down only to return with a scantling to be used as a battering ram.

36 History of Milwaukee, 299.
37 Ibid., 299.
According to the description in this account it took nineteen blows to cause the solid wood work to give way and the lock finally to break and the door to open.

In anticipation for a struggle, the guards had hidden their keys, with the exception of one individual, who had on him the key to open the cell that held Clarke and Shelton. The mob struggled with the jailer, handling him very roughly, ending up with keys to the cell. The mob then continued on to the cell that held Clark. While the mob was preoccupied with Clark, Shelton managed to slip away. As Clarke was dragged from the jail to the street he was “pounded and kicked and abused”; from the jail they took Clarke down Jackson Street, half dragging him half carrying him until they reached the corner of Huron and Milwaukee Street where they stopped to light a gas-street lamp in order to confirm that they had the right individual. From there they continued towards Detroit Street to Engine House No. 6. They reached the engine house at approximately one o’clock in the morning. Once at the engine station it was reported Clarke was hustled inside and “was given the cold mockery of a travesty of justice called a trial. The sentence has been passed beforehand – blood was what these ill-favored judges wanted and blood they gave.”

While the “trial” in the engine house was in progress Sheriff Larkin arrived in an attempt to persuade the mob to hand over the prisoner. After approximately an hour within the engine house, Clarke was dragged outside by a rope where he was hurried down East Water Street until they reached Buffalo Street. Here the mob stopped in front of a pile driver. In graphic detail the account in the History of Milwaukee details the execution:

38 History of Milwaukee, 303.
Clarke was placed alongside one of the posts of the pile driver. The poor wretch slowly put his arm around it, but said nothing. Just then someone of the crowd rushed up and struck him with his fist, and he fell down between the timbers of the machine. He was picked up, while someone of the human wolves took the end of the rope, and running partly up the ladder, slipped it over a round. The final scene was quickly enacted and the unfortunate man's body was swung up in mid-air.  

After Clarke was hung, the policemen took the body down, placed it in the station house and the crowd dispersed. Which station house is not known. It was reported that many condemned the lynching of Clarke and it created mass excitement throughout the city. Later that Sunday an inquest was held upon the body of Darbey Carney. This inquest handed down a verdict of death from injuries inflicted by a knife at the hands of James Shelton and that Clarke was an accessory to murder. Out of fear of further retribution two military companies were stationed outside of the jail. The following Tuesday morning police arrested Shelton in Waukesha and brought him back to Milwaukee.

Upon arriving in Milwaukee Shelton was put on trial beginning on September 30th.  

District Attorney Stark for the prosecution and a Mr. J. V. V Platto for the defense. After nine days of proceedings the jury returned with a verdict of not guilty. After the trial the Sheriff took Shelton to the office of his attorney. After the disbursement of a crowd of Clarks' acquaintances Shelton had a hot meal at a nearby restaurant where he had once worked. As soon as it was dark outside, Shelton was taken into a nearby store by the name of Salsmann's, escorted to the back of the building to waiting transportation that

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39 History of Milwaukee, 304.
took him to the plank road near the entrance of what was the Milwaukee Garden. From there he travelled to Watertown and then to Chicago.

- **September 26, 1868, John Nevel, Richland Center, Richland County, WI.**

  The lynching that took place on September 26, 1868 in Richland Center, WI and the events leading up to it are some of the most disturbing of the events being examined. On September 26 John Nevel, fifteen, was taken from his jail cell and hung from a nearby tree for the murder of a Mrs. Anna Wallace. The age of the lynching victim, as well as his killing, are not the only disturbing factors in this case but in actuality the culmination of several.

  John Nevel was born around 1853 or 1854, in the state of Pennsylvania, the son of Clemson Nevel. Clemson was born in Lycoming, Pennsylvania in 1811. According to records Clemson married a woman by the name of Sarah Eliza Marsh in 1836. It is possible that Sarah, who later died, may have been the mother of Clemson’s children; by 1860 Clemson and a Rachel, born in Ohio, were married. At some point during young John’s life he and his family moved to Wisconsin. According to the 1860 census Clemson worked as a farmer in the Town of Dayton in Richland County, Wisconsin. At this point John was the youngest of five, with the oldest brother, George, aged twenty, followed by Mary, eighteen, Abigail, fourteen, Levi, nine and John, six.\(^{41}\) There may have been other siblings: Sarah born in 1851 and Leon also born in 1851. Not much more is known about the life of John before 1868 except for what can be taken from the previously mentioned census records.

Sometime on the day of September 6, 1868, John Nevel attacked and attempted to rape a young girl, aged eleven. Her younger brother present to witness the attack. Nevel threatened to harm the children with death should the girl resist him or if either of the children told someone about the crime. The crime went unreported until September 20 and a warrant was issued on the twenty-first for the apprehension of Nevel. The crime went unreported The reason for the delay in reporting the crime was said to have been that the young girls’ mother was not home at the time as “she being away picking hops.”

The issue of the warrant is what is thought to have set John, and his next crime, in motion. Whether this is true or if it was an act committed in the moment, we will never know. On September 24, 1868 the remains of a Mrs. Anna Wallace were found on the farm that she shared with her husband Patrick Wallace. According to a local article written on Nevel and the crimes, on Thursday, September 24, 1868 news spread throughout town that the remains of a women had been found near the home of Patrick “Pat” Wallace. In graphic detail it was said that the “head had been eaten by the hogs and her body otherwise mutilated by them.” It was soon determined that these were in fact the remains of Mrs. Anna Wallace discovered by her husband Pat. After the discovery Justice Farlin and Sheriff McMurtrey, along with several citizens, arrived at the crime scene.

Upon examination of the remains it was disclosed that it appeared the head of the victim “had been cut off, deep gash cut into each side of the body, the flesh of one arm almost cleft from it, a fearful cut in the calf of one of her legs, and all these marks clearly

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42 “Nobody to Blame Last Week,” Richland County Republican (Richland Center, WI), October 8, 1868.
43 “Horrible Crimes” The Richland County Republican (Richland Center, WI), October 1, 1868, 1.
indicated the use of a murderous ax as the weapon of her taking.” 44 Search of the residence and surrounding area resulted in the discovery of the ax clotted with blood and hair. The location of the body was twenty rods (just over one hundred yards) from the house in the direction of her father in law’s residence and was marked by a trail of blood. Upon inspection of the home it appeared that a small amount of money, coat and underclothes were taken. At this point the testimony of Mr. Pat Wallace, relative, friends and neighbors was taken. It was concluded that the identity of the perpetrator was John Nevel. Based on the statement of Patrick Wallace’s father, in the morning of the day of the murder, John Nevel had inquired at the home of John Wallace whether his son Pat had a firearm he was willing to trade. John had indicated he did not. Later that day John was seen a few miles from the crime scene with blood on his face. When he was questioned about his appearance he reportedly said he had gotten into a spat with a girl and was in the process of leaving the county. Along with their knowledge of the previously issued warrant for the attack on the young girl, a group assembled to apprehend Mr. Nevel. This group included the constable and father in law of the victim.

The group quickly learned that John was on his way to Readstown, located west of Richland Center and the Town of Dayton. On the evening of Thursday, September 24th John stopped in Readstown and attended a local dance and slept at the hotel. He left the next day after inquiring about how to get to Ferryville and asked about the State of Iowa. John wanted to travel south in an attempt to evade the authorities. John reached Ferryville on the evening of Thursday, September twenty-fifth. Before entering town he changed

44 “Horrible Crimes,” 1.
into the clothes he had stolen from the Wallace residence and deposited his old clothes in
the local post office. From there he paid for lodging at a local boarding house.

The group looking for John reached Ferryville around 8 o’clock in the evening
that Thursday. Upon hearing of his location they were lead to his room and arrested him.
With him they found the stolen property, a double barrel pistol, some powder and caps, a
couple of knives, and other things he bought on the road.\textsuperscript{45} That night, members of the
posse stayed with Nevel and tried to solicit a confession but Nevel would not give it to
them. In the morning of Friday, September 25\textsuperscript{th} the posse, along with the newly detained
Nevel, started back towards Richland Center but not before stopping at the post office to
retrieve the items that John had disposed of the day before, including the vest he had been
wearing which appeared to have blood on it. From Ferryville they went to Towerville for
dinner; at this point Nevel had yet to make a confession. As they continued on their
journey Nevel was allowed to ride a horse rather than walk. While riding he engaged in
conversation with a member of the group and eventually confessed to the murder of Mrs.
Wallace.

According to John Nevel, after he left elder Wallace’s farm, he went to Pat’s
house, knowing that Mrs. Wallace had recently spent time picking hops and assumed she
would have some money with her, and having a five-dollar bill, wanted it changed. Mrs.
Wallace answered the door and brought out her pocket book to make change. When John
saw that she had money he decided he was going to kill her and take it [the money].
When she went to put the pocket book back and sat down with her back to him John
pulled out a pistol and shot her in the back of the head. When she was struck she jumped

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Ibid.}, 2.
up, looked at him, and ran out the door in the direction of her father in law’s. Upon realizing that she may live, John grabbed an ax sitting next to the door and took off after her. Though she had a head start on him she eventual fell and John attacked her with the ax. After he was sure that she was dead, he returned to the house took the money and clothing and started for the Mississippi River with the intention of going to Iowa.

On Saturday, September 26th the prisoner was brought to Richland Center. As news spread that John was being brought to town the atmosphere within Richland Center was described as “intense, the village streets were thronged with the relations and friends of his victim, the people of an outraged community.”46 John was brought to the courthouse and a preliminary examination was held and counsel for both the state and the defendant were present. At this preliminary hearing a motion was granted to continue on Monday and court was dismissed and John was taken to the county jail. These events concluded at approximately two o’clock in the afternoon which was about the same time the funeral cortege for Mrs. Wallace passed through the streets. It was described that the “train of buggies, wagons and pedestrians made the largest procession of its kind ever witnessed in the streets of the town…the almost insane husband, the nearly distracted relatives and friends of the deceased presented a spectacle that thrilled the hearts of every onlooker.”47 It is said that at the cemetery before Mrs. Wallace’s internment the casket was opened for those present to see what remained of the body. It was the sight of the remains in such a grisly state that roused the crowd for revenge.

Once internment was completed the crowd that had gathered at the cemetery made its way to the courthouse square which was estimated to be around four o’clock. After a

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46 Ibid., 3.
47 Ibid., 3.
brief consultation a mob armed with revolvers and rope swiftly rushed the door of the jail. The mob was met by officers at the door of the jail who tried to dissuade them from entering. However, the mob could not be stopped, the door to the prison was broken down, the prisoner seized and taken outside. Based on the description given by the newspaper report the time it took for the mob to remove Nevel from the jail until the time he was killed was swift. It was reported “in less time than it takes to pen this sentence, the soul of the miserable wretch was launched into the sweet subsequently...he was taken to a tree nearby, his body swung in the air and all was over.”48 Immediately after the lynch the crowd dispersed and the body of the boy taken down by the authorities who released it to his family. The Grand Jury dropped the charges after indicting the persons who orchestrated the lynching.

- September, 1869, Native American, New Lisbon, Juneau County, WI.

One of the struggles that all researchers face is when they hit a dead end or are unable to find information on their topic. This is the case regarding the lynching that is said to have happened in September of 1869 to an unnamed Native American in New Lisbon, Wisconsin within Juneau County. The first time this lynching was noted is in the book by Michael J. Pfeiffer entitled The Roots of Rough Justice: Origins of American Lynching. In the appendix of the book Pfeiffer lists lynchings that took place in the Northeast, Midwest, and West from 1840 – 1877. Of the lynchings that took place in Wisconsin, he lists one occurring in New Lisbon Wisconsin, Juneau County, in September of 1869. The name of the individual is only listed as “Indian”, his race is “N” for Native American. The alleged offense that this individual was lynched for is listed as murder and he was

48 Ibid., 4.
hung. Pfeiffer does not offer any more analysis of this event. Pfeiffer’s source is a book entitled *The History of Wisconsin, Volume II: The Civil War Era, 1848-1873* by Richard N. Current, published in 1976. Within Current’s writings he discusses the lynchings that took place in Wisconsin, specifically the lynchings and violence that occurred in September of 1869. He notes that a year after the Nevel lynching of 1868 in Richland Center, lynchers “made short work of an Indian who, according to the Kilborn City Mirror, had murdered a Frenchman in the cranberry marsh north of Necedah and had been jailed in New Lisbon.”\(^49\) According to Current he quotes the paper as having said “on Sunday a masked mob came down from Necedah, forcibly entered the jail, and, taking the Indian out, hung him to the nearest tree.”\(^50\) No other information via contact with the historical society or through research of sources yielded any more details.

- **September 16, 1869, Williams H. Spain, Portage, Columbia County, WI**
- **September 18, 1869, Patrick Wildrick, Portage, Columbia County, WI**

The lynchings of William H. Spain and Patrick Wildrick in September of 1869 in Portage, Wisconsin were part of a larger event that has been referred to as “Bloody September” in Wisconsin history. In the span of twelve days and within a territory of a thirty to forty-mile radius centering on the Wisconsin River town of Kilbourn City (now known as Wisconsin Dells), four murders and two lynchings took place; of the six deaths, three are associated with the lynchings that will be discussed as part of this writing.\(^51\)

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\(^50\) Ibid., 523.

The lynchings of Spain and Wildrick on September 16 and September 18, respectively, was part of a larger story that centered on a third individual: a man by the name of Schuyler Gates. In order to understand the circumstances of the lynchings it is necessary to understand the connection between Gates, Wildrick, and Spain as well as the circumstances of their lives.

Patrick Wildrick was born in 1842 in Ireland the oldest child of a Mr. Daniel and Catherine Wildrick, also of Irish birth.52 At the time of the 1850 census Patrick and his younger siblings, a Daniel and Margaret Wildrick, lived in Pendleton New York. By the next census in 1860 Patrick and his family resided in the Town of Newport, Wisconsin located in Columbia County. According to one source Pat and his family had come to Juneau County in 1855 following the first wave of Irish immigrants.53 His brother Daniel no longer resided with the family but another younger sibling, a girl of four, born in New York. Patrick Carrey also born in Ireland resided with the family. Patrick’s father was listed as a railroad laborer as was Mr. Carrey.54 At one time the family purchased and farmed land in Juneau County. Later, when the family moved to Kilbourn City Pat’s father tended bar at a place called the Tanner House. Based on draft registration records of enlistment for the Second Congressional District that consisted of the counties of Columbia and Jefferson, Wisconsin, Patrick enlisted and took part in the Civil War. The record, taken October 16, 1863, listed Patrick as being from the Town of Newport, aged

53 Durbin, 183.
twenty, white, a laborer by trade, unmarried, born in Ireland and having no former military experience.\textsuperscript{55}

William H. Spain was born in Ireland around the year 1830.\textsuperscript{56} According to the 1860 census he lived in the town of Preston in Adams County, Wisconsin. He married a woman by the name of Mary, also born in Ireland around the year 1836. In 1860 they had two daughters, the eldest just three years old and the younger, one-year-old. William’s listed occupation was that of lawyer. William Spain participated in the Civil War obtaining the rank of Captain and commanding officer of Company D a part of the Nineteenth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry.\textsuperscript{57} At one point he had acted as the Register of Deeds in Adams County and for the previous six months before his murder had been practicing law.\textsuperscript{58}

Schuyler Samuel Stone Gates was born on January 22, 1805, in Vermont.\textsuperscript{59} During his life Gates married three times. The first to Mary Ann (Pratt) Gates, also a Vermont native, in 1828 with whom he had six children. Schuyler and his family first came to the Wisconsin Dells area in July of 1849. On October 12, 1849 Mary Ann died shortly after their arrival. Gates’ second wife, named Elizabeth A. Finnegan, and with whom he had one son, Schuyler, Jr. in 1852. Elizabeth left Gates in 1857 taking their son with her. For

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\textsuperscript{58} "Murder and Lynch Law; Barney Britt Shot! William H. Spain, the Murderer Hung by the Excited Populace! An Exciting Day in Portage!" \textit{The Mauston Star} (Mauston, WI), September 23, 1869.
a third and final time in 1867, Gates married Mary Ann Cukasack, who was approximately forty years his junior.

The lives of these three men, and the actions that would lead to the lynching of Spain and Wildrick, intersect in 1868. Schuyler Gates and his third wife, Mary Ann, made preparations to leave Kilbourn City. The plan was to proceed to Helena, roughly seventy-four miles downstream, where friends lived, stay there for a time and continue by way of the Mississippi to St. Louis. The final destination was said to be that of Gates’ daughter, Lovinia, who resided in Minneapolis, Kansas.\(^6\) This visit was their last stop before settling on land that gates had purchased on a trip to Kansas the previous year. The transportation of Schuyler and his family consisted of three vessels: a waumias for their larger items and two smaller skiffs. In addition to their physical belongings Gates carried twenty-two hundred dollars in cash with him in his money belt. Gates and his family began their travels on May 30, 1868. On June 2, 1868, Gates and his family had covered more than sixty miles. They had hoped to make it to Helena that night, however, due to inclement weather, they were forced to camp on an island near Arena. There they found themselves in dire straits.

In the early morning of June 3, 1868, two masked thieves attacked Gates and his family. Gates was severely beaten in the encounter and Gates’ wife, Mary Ann, was raped. The thieves took the money belt that Gates had been wearing along with a gold watch and other jewelry. Some newspapers reported at the time that one of the thieves wanted to kill both Gates and his wife; however, he was dissuaded by his comrade. When

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\(^6\) Durbin, 182.
the men were finished they left Gates for dead and Mary Ann tied to a tree; the boats
containing the Gates family possessions were cut loose and left to float downstream.

After the assailants left, Mary Ann freed herself from her bindings. She
discovered caught in some brush downstream one of the boats that had been set
adrift. Mary Ann managed to get her severely beaten husband onto the boat and made
their way to a nearby residence where they spent several days recovering. Once they had
healed enough they made their way to Sauk City and then Baraboo. When interviewed by
the authorities Schuyler Gates told them that he recognized one of the assailants as
Patrick Wildrick.

Following the news of the assault the Sauk County Circuit Court was in session
and on June 9th a grand jury convened to hear the testimony from Gates and others. An
indictment against Patrick Wildrick also named an accomplice only referred to as
“Mississippi Jack”. Columbia County dispatched Deputy Sheriff Phidelus Poll to look for
the men. Authorities found men approximately two weeks later in McGregor, Iowa, in a
brothel. Pool, assisted by the local authorities, apprehended Wildrick after a struggle.
Unfortunately, his accomplice escaped. When they searched Wildrick they found eleven
hundred dollars presumably money belonging to Gates.

Wildrick was housed at the jail in Baraboo since the crime he was charged with
occurred in Sauk County. At his arraignment he pleaded not guilty. A continuance was
granted to him since it was the last day of the court term and neither he nor the state were
ready to go to trial. Unable to make bail, Wildrick was confined to jail until the next court
period several months later at the end of October. Though he did attempt a daring escape,
he was recaptured and remained in jail until autumn.
At his next court hearing in October Wildrick’s lawyer requested a change in venue on the ground that a fair trial could not be had in Baraboo because of his reputation and notoriety. With no choice but to grant the motion, the judge presiding over the hearing allowed the trial to be moved to the Juneau County Circuit Court with Judge George W. Cate presiding. In May of 1869 Patrick came before Judge Cate and his attorney claimed that their material witness was ill and asked for another continuance. The judge acquiesced and rescheduled the trial for October 1869. However, in an act that drew astonishment from many in the public, the judge permitted Wildrick to make bail for two thousand dollars, a reduction of three thousand dollars from the original requirement and less than what he had reportedly stole from Gates.61 However, on September 10, 1869, authorities apprehended Pat again in the City of Portage, in Columbia County after he tried to rob a man he had been playing cards with that evening.

The following Monday Wildrick came before Judge Joshua J. Guppiey. People said Judge Guppiey had neither Judge Cate’s sympathy nor fear. At the hearing the district attorney recused himself from the trial; the following month in Juneau County the attorney would be representing Wildrick in the Gate’s robbery and assault case. It was then Wildrick chose to hire William H. Spain as counsel. Spain was ill tempered, contentious and a “much disliked Irishman.”62

That same day, Monday September 13, 1869, Schuyler Gates crossed a bridge into Sauk County to pick cranberries. The bridge tender conversed with Mr. Gates and a short time after, two cohorts of Patrick Wildrick, also crossed the bridge. Not soon after a Reedsburg farmer reported finding a body on the road, approximately three quarters of a

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61 Durbin, 185.
62 Ibid., 186.
mile beyond the bridge. Schuyler Gates had been shot approximately six times. People within the surrounding communities believed Gates had been murdered to prevent him from testifying at Wildrick’s trial.

The previous day at the bail hearing Wildrick’s Attorney, Spain, got into an altercation with a courtroom spectator, a man by the name of Dan Ginder. On Tuesday, September 14, 1869, Judge Guppey reprimanded Attorney Spain in court when he [Spain] became enraged. Judge Guppey proceed to set bail at five thousand dollars for Wildrick which Wildrick could not raise. After court adjourned, Spain, angry that he could not free his client and still enraged from the previous day’s altercation, threatened to kill Ginder; people saw Spain stalking the Ginder outside his place of work. On Thursday, September 16, 1869, Spain got into an argument with a man named Barney Britt with whom he was acquainted - and did not like - stemming from their time in the military during the Civil War. According to reports they encountered each other twice that day and the last time resulted in Spain going home to retrieve his revolver. Spain then rejoined Britt and after warning Britt to stand down Spain drew his pistol exclaimed “take that you son of a bitch” and shot Britt. Spain took off immediately and sought refuge by surrendering to the Portage city marshal after the crowd began to chant “hang him.” Spain was put in the lock-up until the mob that had witnessed the murder of Britt forced open the door that housed Spain, put a rope around his neck and hung him from a tree at the corner of Lock and Wisconsin Street.

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64 Durbin, 188.
The following evening in Lyndon Station, Mauston, Baraboo, Portage and Kilbourn men were seen gathering wearing overcoats and wearing hats over their eyes; unusual given how warm it was at that time of the year. The train to Portage was said to have been full as was the stage coach to Baraboo. A crowd, estimated to be between one hundred twenty-five and one hundred fifty men, gathered outside the jail in Portage. The mob forced open the door, tied up the sheriff and his men, and found Wildrick in his cell. The men coolly retrieved Pat from his cell, put a noose around his neck and took him to a tree in a nearby ravine and hung him.\textsuperscript{66, 67}

- **May 1871, Louis Nohr, Oconto, Oconto County, WI**

The lynching that took place in the town of Oconto, in Oconto County, in 1871 is the only known lynching on record to happen in northeast Wisconsin. At the time Oconto was a lumbering town with a population of approximately four thousand. There is contradictory evidence in relation to the date. In an account of the event that was posted in an Oconto newspaper in 169 the date given is May 2, 1871. However, several newspaper accounts of the era suggest that the initial murder of the victim and the subsequent lynching of his killer took place on May 29\textsuperscript{th} and May 30\textsuperscript{th} respectively.\textsuperscript{68}

On the evening of May 29, 1871 the local Turner Verein, held its annual ball in Oconto. The Turner Verein included members of mostly German descent. The American Turners was and remains to this day a national organization founded by German

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 77.
\textsuperscript{67} Patrick Wildrick was buried at St. Mary’s Cemetery in Lyndon Station because the churches in Wisconsin Dells would not allow him to be buried in their cemeteries. Source of this?
\textsuperscript{68} I will be utilizing the timeline of events I have gathered from the varying newspaper accounts of the events: May 29\textsuperscript{th} and May 30\textsuperscript{th}. Another inconsistency is the spelling of the lynching victim’s name. I have found evidence of it spelled as Louis Nohr, Louis Neher, Louie Nohr, Ludwig Neher, Ludwig Nier and Lewis Neher. For the purpose of this paper I will utilize the pronunciation of Louis Nohr.
immigrants. According to the American Turners website their motto is “a sound mind in a sound body” and describe themselves as “a family organization encouraging people of all ages to be mentally and physically active.” After fleeing Germany, it was their goal to keep German traditions alive in America until they could return to Europe. However, as time passed, the idea of returning to Germany became more remote and they established themselves in America.\textsuperscript{69}

The local Oconto Turners held their gala in a hall located in the upstairs of a building on the west side of Superior Street and near the Holt Lumber Company’s mill. According to an eye witness, George Lerline, who years later recounted the events of that evening, explained that the lower part of the building where the gala took place was occupied as a butcher shop by Louie (Louis) Nohr. Mr Lerline described Louis as being about forty years old, approximately 5’6” and about one hundred fifty pounds and a member of the Turner Verein.

Between ten and twelve o’clock that evening a group of men, thought to have been drinking, attempted to enter the hall where the dance was being held. They gathered at the bottom of the outside open stairway that lead to the hall. Twenty-two-year-old river driver by the name of Dennis White attempted to ascend the staircase to enter the hall. Louis Nohr, the butcher, stood guard, and though previous attempts had been made to enter the event, Louis would not let them pass. Heated words were exchanged and Nohr armed with a large butcher knife, approximately eighteen inches long raised the knife and struck at White threatening to sever his head. In self-defense White put up his arms and

was struck by the knife “cutting his arms to the bone and severing arteries and muscles alike, with for the result that for several weeks afterwards he has to be fed at the Dillon House, where he boarded.”

White ran down the stairs followed by Nohr who had traded the knife for a revolver. While running down the stairs Nohr shouted to the group of men to leave the premises. When the men would not listen and leave Nohr shot into the assembled group. Accounts reported that a bullet “grazed the chin of John Noyen, burning the flesh and cutting off part of his whiskers as well.” Next Nohr fired the second shot into the crowd struck a twenty-one year old man by the name of Joseph Ruelle who had been standing near a hitching post away from the crowd. Ruelle recently finished the common schools and planned to enter college and participated in a local band. After being shot, Ruelle was taken to a local hotel and died within the hour.

Authorities immediately arrested Nohr and took him to jail. Nohr remained in the jail from the time he was arrested the evening of May 29, until the following evening. While being housed in the local jail the atmosphere in town turned into “a mad frenzy and hysteria.” On the evening of May 30 a mob of fifteen to twenty men actively engaged in removing Nohr from the jail while several hundred people gathered to watch. A man by the name of Mr. Call attempted to block the mob, however, when the mob produced a large timber and thrust it in his direction he got out of the way. The men used the timber to break down the jail door, after which approximately fifteen men entered the building and found Nohr in his cell. Using axes and hammers they broke down the bars and took

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71 Ibid.
him from the jail. Once removed from his cell a rope was placed around Nohr’s neck; he tried to fight back, digging his heels into the ground as they dragged him down the road. When they came upon a bridge someone told Nohr that he should ‘say his prayers because he was going to hang there’. In actuality they kept on walking, moving past the bridge. Why the sudden change in plans was unclear. From the jail, past the bridge, they stopped at what would later become the future court house grounds. At the time the area consisted of a field with a fence and creek running through it.

The men threw the rope over the limb on an oak tree that stood “on the northeast corner of the courthouse grounds and hung Nohr. It was said that he was still alive when he was hung from the tree but barely, having been beat up by the mob on the way to the spot of the lynching. At about four o’clock the next morning a cart drawn by a team of horses carried the body of Nohr away after he had been cut down from the tree. He was buried “in a sand hill located at the back of the Bond Pickle Company’s plant on a grove of Jack pines.”72 Sadly, the body of Nohr was dug up by dogs because the remains had not been buried deep enough. Afterwards the local coroner collected the remains and reburied them in another location. After the lynching several members of the Turner Verein left Oconto and did not return for several weeks.

72 Ibid.
• October 1875, Isiah and Amos Courtwright, Stevens Point, Portage County, WI.

The double lynching that took place in October of 1875 of brothers Isiah and Amos Courtwright, in Stevens Point, WI, culminated from the murder of Sheriff Joseph Baker by the Courtwrights two days prior when the Sheriff attempted to execute a writ of restitution. The events that ensued and culminated in the double lynching of the brothers still resonated within the community of Stevens Point well into the twentieth century.

The events that led to the lynching of the Courtwright brothers on the evening of October 18, 1875 began several years earlier and can be attributed to a mortgage lien. Amos Courtwright was the business partner of a man by the name of Luther Hanchett. Together, the men owned a saw mill situated on the Plover River in the early 1850’s. In August of 1856, Hanchett sold his share of the business and property to Amos, “conveying to him the mill, pine lands, and all the personal property, and Courtwright agreeing to pay all the debts of the partnership and the further sum of two thousand dollars, for which he executed his two notes of one thousand dollars each, secured by mortgage on the mill and other real estate.”73 In 1862 Hanchett, who at the time was a member of Congress, died. The Hanchett estate then began the necessary process for satisfaction of the unpaid mortgage liens. While the estate proceedings progressed a man by the name of J. O Raymond married Hanchett’s widow Lucinda and took a direct interest in the prosecution of the estate claims. As described in the Stevens Point Journal at the time “suit was commenced upon these notes by the administrators against Courtwright in 1863 and in 1868 judgment was obtained in the Green Lake Circuit Court,

73 “Murdered. Full Details of the Killing of Sheriff Baker,” Stevens Point Journal (Stevens Point, WI), October 16, 1875.
the administrators first endorsed upon the notes all of the accounts which Courtwright claimed against Luther Hatchett... and taking judgment for the balance."\textsuperscript{74}

Amos Courtwright owned a farm in Buena Vista, a town located outside of Stevens Point. J. O Raymond sought possession of Amos's property in order to satisfy the outstanding liens from the estate. The Courtwrights refused to be evicted from the property and the case dragged on within the courts, becoming more hostile as time went on, and eventually leading to October 11, 1875 when Sheriff Joseph baker was "forced to execute a writ of restitution against Amos and Isaiah Courtwright on the farm in Buena Vista."\textsuperscript{75}

This was not the first time that Sheriff Baker had visited the Courtwright farm regarding the matter of the lien. On previous occasions he had warned the family of the impending action of eviction to which they had allegedly warned him that should he return, he would be shot. Baker was not deterred and on the evening of October 11 he returned to the Courtwright property with a group of men to remove the Courtwrights from the premises. When Sheriff Baker arrived he "crossed the fence and started towards the house, which was occupied by the Courtwrights, and was immediately fired upon from an upper window, ran after returning fire, re-crossed the fence and fell mortally wounded."\textsuperscript{76} (Another man, Cameron, who was trying to aid Baker was also wounded but he survived.) The group of Courtwrights within the home, which varies depending on the account, consisted of Amos and Isaiah, Amos's wife, daughter and son. The sheriff

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Edward McGlachlin, \textit{A Standard History of Portage County, Wisconsin: An Authentic Narrative of the Past, with Particular Attention to the Modern Era in the Commercial, Industrial, Educational, Civic and Social Development} (Chicago, IL: Lewis Pub., 1919), 103.
\textsuperscript{76} H. G Ingessoll, ed., "A Shocking Murder! Death of Sheriff Baker; Intense Excitement," \textit{The Plover Times} (Plover, WI) October 15, 1875.
deputies carried Baker to a granary, located on the property, and then surround the house. It was there that he [Baker] instructed the men to set fire to the house to drive out the Courtwrights. The men did as they were instructed, but the resulting amount of smoke created by the fire, coupled with the darkness of evening, allowed the Courtwrights to escape into the woods. Sheriff Baker died twelve hours later.

The Courtwright brothers, along with members of Amos’s family, made their way to the nearby farm of Justice of the Peace Leonidas Lombard where they surrendered. The Sheriff deputies learned of their location and surrounded the house. The group of deputies had intended to set fire to the home but were stopped by the under-sheriff and father in law of Sheriff Baker, John Eckels. He insisted that the law take its course. They arrested the Courtwrights and took them to the Stevens Point jail.

Sheriff Baker died in the early morning hours of Tuesday, October 12th; his funeral took place later that week. During the first days of imprisonment a special security guard had been detailed to the jail. Shortly after the community learned of Sheriff Baker’s murder there were rumblings of a mob and lynching. When those who were planning to lynch the Courtwright brothers heard of the extra security detail at the jail, they pulled back. The special security detail was gradually withdrawn until only one man guarded the jail. On the night of the lynching, Monday, October 18, John Wheelock was on duty. That evening a mob assembled, entering the residence area of the jail, overpowering Wheelock, handcuffing him and threatening to shoot him should he make any noise. The mob then began to take down the cell doors that laid between them and the Courtwrights. Sourced said that when the Courtwrights heard the commotion and
realized what was happening "they sent up the most blood curdling shricks and hallowed ‘murderers’ at the top of their voices." \(^{77}\)

When the mob took down the initial door there were three more doors to go through before they got to where the Courtwrights were being held. Based on accounts from the evening there were three keys to the inside doors, one of which was reported to have gone missing since the night that Sheriff Baker had been killed. It was surmised that this "missing key" was used that evening. Proceeding through the doors with ease, few words were spoken. Another inmate of the jail stated that he only "saw three or four men, one of these had a mask on, and the others had their faces blackened." \(^{78}\) Sounds of scuffling came from the cell and what sounded like blows could be heard and the hat that Amos had with him had several cuts to it and a lock of his hair was found in the cell and a considerable amount of blood was left on the outside steps. They took the two men to a waiting wagon and proceeded to an area called Phillips grove and hung them. The lynching was held about three quarters of a mile from the jail.

A newspaper account described the men as hung from the same tree: "a pine which stand just outside the wagon truck, the ropes being fastened to the limbs so that the bodies hung dangling over the road, their feet a few inches from the ground." \(^{79}\) Further description detailed the state of the bodies of the men as they hung from the tree:

The clothing of Isiah, badly saturated with blood, was a most sickening one, the ropes were quite long, and the one with which Isiah was hanged was badly covered with blood an indication that the ropes had been taken to the prison and probably placed around the necks of the men while yet inside the building. Dr.

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\(^{77}\) "Lynched. A Masked Mob Take the Courtwrights from the Jail and Hang Them," *Stevens Point Journal* (Steven Point, WI), October 23, 1875.

\(^{78}\) Ibid.

\(^{79}\) Ibid.
Orrick who examined the bodies thinks that Amos must have been nearly quite dead, when hanged. His eyes were closed and his face slightly discolored. There was a gash cut in his finger and also evidence that they had been dealt a blow on the head. Isiah, though his body showed signs of harder usage than that of Amos was probably killed by strangulation coupled with a partial dislocation of the neck. His eyes were open and his face considerably discolored. He had a gash in his head and although it did not reach the skull it must have bled profusely. There was also a slight gash on his face. Both had their hands tied behind them, but their feet unbound. The right boot of each was gone. The latter is said to be the private mark that 'Judge Lynch' usually places upon his victims.\textsuperscript{80}

Found down the road, smoldering embers were found indicating that the lynching party gathered there either before going to the jail, after, or both. The bodies hung from the tree until about eleven o'clock the following morning when they were removed and placed in coffins.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
Chapter Three

Analysis: What happened?

Each lynching in Wisconsin initially appear to be different, given they occurred in different locations, at different times, and the specific details of the initial crimes, that led to the lynchings of the individuals, differ. However, there are many shared circumstances and details between these events. The analysis is laid out the same way as the chapter: each lynching is listed chronological order. The lynchings are analyzed by examining specific circumstances such as race and class, criminal history, media coverage, public reaction and whether s any prosecution of the perpetrators took place. Each of these is applied in order to analyze the lynchings and their circumstances and answer the overall questions presented in the thesis statement: are these lynchings the result of ethnic norms? Or were was the majority trying to police those who resided on the fringes of society?

September 6, 1861, Marshall Clark, Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI.

Of the lynchings that occurred between 1861 and 1875, two of the lynching victims were non-whites: Marshall Clark, 1861 in Milwaukee, African American and the lynching victim killed in 1869 in New Lisbon, Native American. The men involved in the fight that lead to the lynching of Clarke included: Marshal Clarke and James Shelton, both African Americans, and Darbey Carney and John Brady, both Irish.
Marshal Clarke was the son of a well-respected local barber George Clarke. Marshall was born around 1838 also a barber by trade.\textsuperscript{81} \textsuperscript{82} In 1860 Marshall resided with family, his father George and George’s wife, Anoignite Clarke, thirty-two years of age at the time and born in Missouri. George’s listed occupation is barber. The youngest inhabitant of the house was named Eugene and was six months old and listed as being born in Wisconsin. Another young man residing with the family who was nineteen at the time, also training to be a barber, was named George H. Clarke, Junior, and a female resident by the name of Anna, sixteen, born in Pennsylvania. As stated Marshall is listed as a resident with the same personal information as the other census.\textsuperscript{83}

James Shelton was listed on the same record that listed Marshall Clarke in the Second Ward. James, a waiter, was born in Virginia around 1832.\textsuperscript{84} Given the year of his birth he may have been an enslaved individual at some point or born to an enslaved at some point. This, however, cannot be confirmed.

According to this naturalization record, Darbey Carney was born in Ireland in 1826, arrived in Buffalo New York in April of 1850, and was naturalized on October 3, 1856.\textsuperscript{85} According to the 1860 Census records Darbey was living in the Third Ward of the City of Milwaukee with his wife, Margaret, also born in Ireland, running a boarding  

\textsuperscript{82} There are two census records from 1860 that list, who I believe to be Marshall Clarke, and provide this information. The first is a census record from the Second Ward in Milwaukee. The second record that lists Marshall comes from the Fourth Ward of Milwaukee.
\textsuperscript{85} National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; Soundex Index to Naturalization Petitions for the United States District and Circuit Courts, Northern District of Illinois and Immigration and Naturalization Service District 9, 1840-1950 (M1285); Microfilm Serial: M1285; Microfilm Roll: 38
Based on the articles on the lynching John Brady was of Irish descent. A search of the 1860 census records for John Brady resulted in numerous hits of many people of the same name. However, there is a result for the 1910 census that lists a John Brady living in the City of Milwaukee with a birthdate of about 1840 and an immigration year of 1849.

During the 1860’s in Milwaukee, racial and ethnic tensions did exist between African Americans’ and Irish immigrants. Many of the conflicts can be credited between the competition between the two groups for jobs. As noted in the book *Selma of the North*: “the influx of German and Irish immigrants to the city [Milwaukee] during the middle part of the 19th Century signaled greater job competition for black workers and a rise in racial tensions.” Also noted in Michael Pfeifer’s article *Wisconsin’s Last Decade of Lynching, 1881-91: Law and Violence in the Postbellum Midwest* states

In Milwaukee...Irish Catholic ethnic solidarity was as pivotal to the emergence of racial violence as a developing concept of “whiteness”. Competing with African Americans for social status and jobs on the lowest rungs of northern society and influenced by the racial slogans and ideology with which the Democratic party sought to link southern planters and northern workers in defense of white supremacy, Irish Catholic communities in the North enacted homicidal collective violence that sought to avenge Irish kinfolk victimized by alleged African American criminality.

This racial and ethnic conflict between the Irish and African Americans in Milwaukee may explain why Marshall Clarke was lynched and why it was a majority Irish mob. The first evidence of this conflict is the reason for the violence between the

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two groups of men that evening in September. The brawl between the two groups is believed to have begun over the fact the African American men were walking with a white woman or women. Pfeiffer referenced this in his article *Wisconsin’s Last Decade of Lynching* and in the book by Richard N. Current *The History of Wisconsin: Volume II, The Civil War Era, 1848-1873* also confirms this. The *Indiana State Sentinel*, which reprinted the account on September 25, 1861 from the original *Milwaukee Wisconsin* article printed September 9, 1861, gave two varying interpretations. The article stated that early Saturday morning after the Friday night incident, the authorities arrested Clarke and Shelton and were jailed after confessing to stabbing Carney. They [Marshall and Clarke] were “in liquor” and that was the “result of a drunken fight about a couple of girls who were passing along at the time”. The friends of those stabbed “claim that the negroes insulted the girls and that Carney and Brady interfered and took their part and that the negroes turned upon them and stabbed them”. The “friends of the negroes claim that the girls were with the latter and that Carney and Brady interfered and picked a quarrel with the negroes, from which sprang a fight, in which the latter defended themselves with knives.”89 There were two versions of what happened based on this article, but both reports suggested racial and ethnic prejudice: either the Irishmen were upset by the occurrence of white women associating with black men or the black men were harassing the white women and the Irishmen were there to defend the white women.

Carney went home to be treated after the stabbing and Shelton and Clarke were taken to jail. The account printed in the *Indiana State Sentinel* claimed that when Carney

89 "Lynch Law in Milwaukee: A Negro Murderer Hung by a Mob," *The Indiana State Sentinel* (Indianapolis, IN), September 25, 1861, accessed September 2015.
died of his injuries the fire bells rang for a fire in the lower part of the city. When the engine companies departed to attend to the fires none could be found. The alarm signaled the mob to avenge the death of Carney. Evidently even before Carney died plans were being devised for how a mob could obtain Clarke and Shelton and inflict extralegal justice. Other newspapers carrying accounts of the lynching cite the mob as being mostly Irish. *The Bay City Press* article covering the lynching stated “Sunday morning. A mob of the countrymen of Carney...assailed the jail...all day Saturday great excitement had existed in the Third Ward where Carney died, the negroes should suffer summary vengeance.”

*The Bay City Press* article also stated that the plan and intention on lynching Clarke were well known all day to the Sheriff and the city officers “whose duty it was to subdue it and prevent this most disgraceful outrage....not the slightest preparation was made by any one of them all to prevent the accomplishment of their fiendish purpose.”

An account of the events the following day appeared in Current’s book *the History of Wisconsin*:

> the next day in search of Shelton some two or three hundred Irishmen went down to a wharf from which a Chicago bound steamer was about to depart with a dozen or more panic stricken Negroes fleeing the city. ‘Be Jasus, let us kill all the damned nagers’ a Milwaukee News reporter heard a member of the mob crying out ‘and then we’ll be sure to get the right one.’

The aftermath that followed the lynching of Clarke comprised of three trials and the resignation of the City of Milwaukee Police Chief, William Beck. The first included the trial of James Shelton for the murder of Carney; five members from the mob that

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90 William J. Green, ed., "Mob Law in Milwaukee," *The Bay City Press* (Bay City), September 14, 1861.
91 Ibid.
92 Current, 390.
lynched Clarke were tried for murder and an investigation into the actions of Sheriff Larkin and his handling of the murder of Carney, jailing of Clarke and Shelton and subsequent mob and lynching. The State of Wisconsin filed charges of murder in the second degree against James Shelton and the trial began on September 30, 1861. The trial lasted nine days concluding with the jury reaching a verdict of not guilty claiming that Shelton had been acting in self-defense when he stabbed Carney. After the trial was completed Shelton was taken out of town immediately for fear of reprisals were strong. It was believed that many in the Irish community, specifically Carney’s friends, were dissatisfied with the verdict and wanted to see the same fate for Shelton as had been doled out for Clark.

Shortly after the trial for Shelton completed the trial for the men involved with the lynching began. John McCormick, Thomas Nichols, Dennis Delury, Patrick McLaughlin and John Devine were indicted for murder. Before the trial began Thomas Nichols fled the city while the remaining five stood trial. Much of the testimony consisted of statements confirming the existence of the mob and the confirming the force used to enter the jail and the subsequent lynching of Clarke but there was an inability to specifically identify anyone in particular involved with the crimes. The jury deliberated for roughly

94 Ibid.
95 State of Wisconsin v. McCormick, Delury, O’Brien, McLaughlin, and Devine (C.C Milwaukee County 1861) Milwaukee County Historical Society – Milwaukee, WI, Milwaukee County Historical Society Archives,
96 “Circuit Court, Milwaukee County, Judge McArthur,” Daily Milwaukee News (Milwaukee), November 14, 1861.
two days before finally coming back unable to reach a verdict. Judge MacArthur, presiding over the trial, then dismissed the jury thus resulting in a hung jury.97

Charges of fraud and neglect of duty were brought against Sheriff Larkin in January of 1862. The proceedings were heard at the executive office in the Capitol in Madison, WI in February and March of that same year.98 Larkin was accused, among other things, to having knowledge of the intentions of the Irish citizenry of the City regarding the two African American men and did nothing to prepare or stop formation of the mob or lynching from happening. Larkin was born in Connecticut but was of Irish ancestry.99,100 Larkin disputed all charges against him and was acquitted.

- **September 26, 1868, John Nevel, Richland Center, Richland County, WI.**

The lynching of John Nevel is unique given his age at the time of his murder and the violence associated with his crime. As discussed in the previous chapter John and his family were racially white and originally from Pennsylvania. John was younger in age in a group of five to seven siblings. John’s victim, Anna Wallace, was born November 23, 1848 to John and Anna Joyce in Galway Ireland; she married Patrick Wallace in April of 1868.101 Patrick, also from Ireland, was born in 1838 and immigrated to the United States in 1850.102 He was a farmer at the time of his wife’s death.

John was not lynched because of his ethnic background. Based on the little information provided by the census records there is no indication he identified with a specific cultural background that would have been the sole factor for his lynching. Two other factors do come into play with his lynching: the ethnic background of his victim and the portrayal of him in the newspaper accounts and the newspaper coverage of the murder of Anna. The news coverage of the event will be discussed first.

No information on John, his temperament or actions can be found thus far before his crimes and his murder in September of 1868. However, one of the newspapers covering the lynching described John as a troubled child. Describing John as “small in stature” he was the “son of a quiet and respectable farmer of the town of Dayton.”103 The article goes on to say that in the years leading up to September he:

had exhibited almost inconceivable degree of depravity in his inclination and actions...though guarded and surrounded by an honest anxious father and friends, during this time he committed all minor depredations within his power which could suggest themselves to a willfully wicked mind. He was troublesome, disobedient, and ungovernable. Yet, till within a few days before committing the crime for which his life was the penalty, his deeds of sin and wickedness were mostly confined to petty thefts and brawls which many are reported...with his apparent instincts, had not his career suddenly terminated, who shall fathom the wretchedness and guilt which a continued life in the exercise of unrestrained passions would have brought him.104

The very depiction of Nevel paints a picture of a very disturbed young man. If the account in the paper is to be believed as an accurate account of Nevel and his upbringing one can believe that he was in fact troubled. However, the paper structures their account of the events by first describing the crime, specifically using words and phrases such as “so revolting to the human senses” “savage butchery” “horrible magnitude of demon like

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103 "Horrible Crime," The Richland County Republican, Richland Center, WI, October/November, 1868.
104 Ibid.
taking of life” to elicit a very specific reaction from the reader. This description is meant to justify the actions of the crowd; Nevel was lynched because he was different and did not fit in with society and the established norms. The paper then goes into the detail described in the excerpt above of the murder, John, then follow with a description of Mrs. Wallace. Mrs. Wallace was:

about twenty years of age, and had been married only six months. She was the fourth daughter of a family of nine children, all highly respected by their numerous acquaintances...endeared to her family and friends by her virtues, her accomplishments and her winning manners, as well as by the common interests of nationality and church her tragic death has cast an immovable cloud of darkness over many hearts and has brought tears to eyes unused to weep. She was a member of the Catholic church, in good standing and she was most regarded as the flower of the flock. That any life should be taken in so fiendish and brutal manner were enough to fire the blood of the coldest heart, and that so horrible a murder of one, so cherished and esteemed by any family or nationality should arouse their most latent feelings were not wholly inappreciable.\footnote{Ibid., 3.}

Within this description the reader is meant to understand the Mrs. Wallace was the exact antithesis to Nevel: pure, a ray of light and of the utmost moral character. This is not to say that Mrs. Wallace was none of these things, but, in this case, her character is used to justify the need to lynch Nevel. The paper clearly wants the reader to understand: he would have continued his ways had he not been stopped. By painting John as an evil youth with an insatiable appetite for wickedness and the victim, Wallace, as a pillar of the community, there is validation and rationalization for the lynching. The need for this justification on the part of the Richland County Republican is evident in the reaction of other newspapers and communities outside of the areas and their supposed condemnation of the lynching. According to the Richland County Republican published the same day as
the article used to describe the murder of Wallace and Nevel above, the reporter indicates that the Madison Journal condemned the action of the members of the community and their lynching of Nevel. The Richland County Republican article describes the "anxiety of some people to become notorious for their enterprise in furnishing items of news sometimes does injustice to the parties to whom the information is given and not unfrequently misrepresents the locality from whence the news is derived."\textsuperscript{106} The author of the article clearly believes that if those in outside communities understood the situation, and carefully and correctly published the facts there would be a better understanding of the situation: "the article as it appeared did great injustice to the people of Richland Center and of the County and it is asked that those papers which had copied that report give our people the benefit of the doubt."\textsuperscript{107}

Not all outside news sources disagreed with the use of lynching to punish Nevel. In the Richland County Republican published October 15\textsuperscript{th} they republish an article from the Dodgeville Chronicle, though making sure not to endorse but to, merely to exhibit the outside sentiment concerning out affairs."\textsuperscript{108} The article from the Dodgeville Chronicle argues that though they cannot condone what was done they reference the poor condition of the jail in Richland Center, specifically a previous case in which a convicted rapist escaped before having his day in court. In the view of that event the Chronicle states that they "cannot be surprised that outraged friends would make sure work in securing to Nevel, the Devil, the punishment he so richly deserved, lest through moral or legal obliquity of lawyers or the leaky condition of the jail, he should again attempt an

\textsuperscript{106} "Let Justice Be Done," \textit{Richland County Republican} (Richland Center, WI), October 8, 1868.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} "The Recent Murder," \textit{Richland County Republican} (Richland Center, WI), October 15, 1868.
escape and perhaps defraud justice of her claims upon him."\textsuperscript{109} This article demonstrates that not only were the news outlets justifying the use of lynch law but also using it as a means by which to claim that the justice system itself is not reliable and the only way to ensure that justice be done is to take matter into their own hands.

Ethnic solidarity and the ethnic background of the victim played a part in the lynching of John Nevel. The ethnic community of the victim wanted to vindicate her death. Similar to the Irish community in Milwaukee there is evidence of strong ethnic solidarity in Richland Center. The idea or the act of lynching is not a specific part of Irish culture, but a strong sense of community, coupled with strong emotions and the nature of Mrs. Wallace’s murder lead to swift extralegal justice. This solidarity is evident in the article published on October 8, 1868 in the Richland County Republican that described Mrs. Wallace’s affiliation with the Irish community. When describing her character she was “endeared to her family and friends...as well as by the common interests of nationality and the church.”\textsuperscript{110} Her family was also well known within the Irish community “all highly respected by their numerous acquaintances, both among Americans and Irish. She was largely and respectably connected among the Irish of the county and the neighborhoods in which her father and husband lived were largely settled by people of her own nationality.”\textsuperscript{111} The article later provided a detailed account of the funeral procession and the activities at the burial, again eliciting strong emotion from the reader and also evidencing the strong community involvement. Earlier in the day of the lynching the court arraigned John; the court postponed the hearing until the following

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Let Justice Be Done}, 1.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
Monday. During the hearing the funeral cortege passed through the streets of Richland Center.

The court arraigned John and postponed the hearing until the following Monday. At the same time the funeral cortege passed through the streets of Richland Center. As described in the article “the train of buggies and wagons and pedestrians – nearly all from the neighborhood of the murder – made the largest funeral processions that ever trod the streets. The almost insane husband and distraught relatives and friends of the deceased presented a spectacle.”¹¹² When the procession made it to the cemetery the grave for the deceased had yet to be dug, and for some unknown reason, the human remains of Mrs. Wallace were displayed when the lid of the coffin was raised. All that was visible was the “mangled neck and jaw bone of the victim” as the head would not be found until the following Monday. A combination of the visible remains and the gruesomeness of the murder, riled the crowd. After the graveside service the mourners formed a mob and made their way to the jail and took John and lynched him. Reference to this ethnic solidarity was also noted in the book The History of Wisconsin. The author referenced the lynching of Nevel and used a quote from the Wisconsin State Journal who published an article on the lynching saying that any attempt to rescue Nevel “would have been useless as the mob was composed principally of Irishmen who were determined to avenge the death of their country woman.”¹¹³

The article in the paper offered their own justification and reasoning behind the use of summary judgment on John Nevel. The article cited the gruesomeness of the murder weighing “heavily upon the mourners” as they had been in mourning for three days and

¹¹² Let Justice Be Done, 2.
¹¹³ Current, 522.
nights with little sleep. The second justification would be the known criminality of the boy, citing the assault of the young girl earlier in the month and the murder of Mrs. Wallace that incited mob members to seek revenge based on the failure of the civil law to provide judgment. Specifically, the unsecure nature of the jail and the ability of prisoners to escape, which had previously been the case, and the failure of the authorities to carry out punishment awarded by the law were all given as validation of the necessity to lynch him.

- **September 1869, Indian, New Lisbon, Juneau County, WI.**

The lynching of the individual described as an Indian in the book *The History of Wisconsin* is the only other individual in the time period established by this research who was of another race and lynched. Based on the account provided in the book the Native American man killed a Frenchman north of Necedah. The individual was then jailed in new Lisbon where he was taken from jail by a mob and hung. Why the Native American was lynched and what the circumstances surrounding the lynching were is hard to analyze given the lack of information found on the event.

The mere fact that there is limited information could be telling in and of itself. The lack of reporting on the event, lack of interest or newsworthiness could be because of the race of the lynched individual. Similar to the circumstances in the lynching of Marshall Clarke in Milwaukee, hostility toward Native Americans was prevalent at the time. It may have been the work of ethnic solidarity as we’ve seen in Milwaukee and Richland Center: fellow Frenchman avenging the death of their comrade. There is only one reference to a published account coming from the Kilbourn City Mirror. In the other lynchings various papers within the state, region and even nationally commented on
lynnings of other white men. At this time not enough information is known to make an
educated claim but only conjecture.

- **September 16, 1869, Williams H. Spain, Portage, Columbia County, WI**
- **September 18, 1869, Patrick Wildrick, Portage, Columbia County, WI**

Similar to the case involving the lynching of John Nevel, the lynchings of William
Spain and Patrick Wildrick in Columbia County in 1869 were justified within the
newspaper accounts based on the questionable background of both men. The residents of
the area were relieved by Wildrick’s death by lynching given his well known criminal
behavior and the supposed terror he inflicted in that region of Wisconsin. The lynching of
Spain ran a similar course: citizens believed it was a deserved punishment and likely to
happen based on his well-documented outbursts and temper. Though both men were of
Irish background, it does not appear, based on the information gathered, that this ethnic
background played a part in the lynchings.

The story of Wildrick and the events that led to his lynching began before his death in
September 1869. Wildrick was being held and charged for the attack and robbery of Mr.
Schuyler Gates and his wife, Mary Ann Gates in June of 1867. Later, many believed
that Wildrick orchestrated the murder of Gates while behind bars. Prior to the crimes
against Mr. Gates, Wildrick had a reputation for violence and a criminal background to
prove it. Patrick Wildrick participated in a well-known local gang that was notorious and
deeply feared along the great bend of the Wisconsin River. This gang preyed upon
recently paid off river men returning northward though Sauk County and on the states

\[114 \text{ State of Wisconsin v. Patrick Wildrick and Mississippi Jack (C.C Sauk County 1868). Wisconsin}
\text{Historical Society – Madison, WI, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives,}

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and drays that passed between Baraboo and Kilbourn City.\textsuperscript{115} In 1865 he and a member of his gang were caught after committing assault and robbery resulting in his imprisonment for a year and a half in the state prison at Waupun. This life of criminality was addressed in a newspaper article published by the \textit{Wisconsin Mirror} shortly after his lynching. The article recounts the lynchings of Spain and Wildrick and asks the “Was the Hanging of Wildrick Justified?”.

This article immediately gave the disclaimer that it was not for them to answer the question of justification directly but to simply share the information they had at hand and for those outside the case to relinquish judgment until they knew the facts. The article first posited that within a community an inherent right to self-defense exists. The citizens within the community use this inherent right to enact rules that they call laws to use as protection. However, for whatever reason these rules cannot be made to protect the inherent right of self-defense reverts back to “the original condition.” The article asked the question that in the case of Wildrick “could the laws be made to protect the community in this case?”. From then on the article used Wildrick’s history of criminality to paint a picture of desperation within the community:

Wildrick has been known to be a desperado for years. Occasionally he got into the law’s traps a little and once into state prison... so wide spread and deep had the terror of him and his gang become that hardly a man in all this region was bold enough to say anything against him or his accomplices for fear spies might overhear. And how much reason they had in fear the fate of Gates tells abundantly: Gates was the only sufficient witness against him [Wildrick], and Gates dies. Pat was in jail at the time of Gates murder whether on purpose... or because his own inherent devilry couldn’t wait any longer to a commit a crime, is not known.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} Durbin, 183.

\textsuperscript{116} Alanson Holly ed., "A Week of Excitement: Two Men Shot! Two Men Hung!" \textit{Wisconsin Mirror} (Kilbourn City, WI), September 22, 1869.
A similar argument was made by the newspaper the *State Register* published on September 25, 1869. The article entitled "Is Lynch Law Ever Justifiable?" and asked the question, based on Wildrick's reputation and position in society, did the citizens have the right to protect themselves from him, when common law could not? Opening the article are quotes from newspapers such as the *Milwaukee Sentinel* and *Chicago Tribune*, both of whom condemned the lynching of Spain and Wildrick. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* stated "suppose they had positively known Pat Wildrick to be guilty...we must denounce the act of those who hung Wildrick as a crime" and the *Chicago Tribune* who wrote "all may admit that society be better off without than with them, there can be no justification of such proceedings."\(^{117}\) The *State Register* dissents from the opinions of the *Sentinel* and *Tribune*:

we are ready to interpose our dissent and declare our firm belief that occasions may and do arise, when it becomes proper and necessary for the people to dispense, for the time being, with the usual agencies they employ to punish crimes and to resume and exercise their original authority as lawmakers...such occasions are rare...but nevertheless not so dangerous as to rely wholly upon the courts under all circumstances.\(^{118}\)

The *Chicago Tribune* admonished the use of extralegal violence; lynching is never justifiable and the worst criminals had better go unpunished if they cannot be convicted in a court of law.\(^{119}\) The *State Register* argued that this is not a reasonable argument and if the law becomes powerless to punish a criminal, not through the faults of the law or the rules of the court, but through the additional crimes of the offender, the

\(^{117}\) "Is Lynch Law Ever Justifiable?" *Wisconsin State Register* (Portage, WI), September 25, 1869.
\(^{118}\) Ibid.
\(^{119}\) Ibid.
Register argued that the power lodges legitimacy somewhere to punish him. Specifically referencing Wildrick orchestrating the murder of Gates behind bars the article states: "if the criminal is known to be guilty by every man in the community but can only be convicted in the courts by the testimony of one man, we do not believe that is the criminal shoots, or causes to be shot, that witness that that act should entitle him to have a nolle prosequin his case."\textsuperscript{120} It is then that the paper uses Wildrick’s criminal history to justify the necessity of the lynching “he was a notorious desperado, known to be so by the whole community he infested; be had served one term in state prison for highway robbery; numerous other crimes were laid at his hands, he stood indicted for another highway robbery of twenty three hundred dollars, committed eighteen months ago, and was out on bail for an amount less than the sum he took from his victim.”\textsuperscript{121} Chillingly the paper states “if a clergyman was in the party God’s blessing on the enterprise was first involved before hanging Pat Wildrick.” The community justified the action because they saw it as a requisite for their safety, their property and their families, and “it was the work of men to whom the community looks up to for protection, men who have the nerve and the will to step into the breach when the law fails them”.

The Wisconsin Mirror posed a similar question “Was the Hanging of Wildrick Justifiable?” in their recounting of the events in Portage. They used the same validations as the Wisconsin State Register, given the widespread terror that Wildrick had spread throughout the community, there was little choice for those who resided within the local society but to take matters into their own hands. Later in the article the newspaper sternly warns the citizenry that “this kind of law, though necessary in great emergencies, is

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid. 1.  
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid. 1.
terribly dangerous to be found in community. If its use were necessary, let it be laid aside and the people return to their other laws as soon as the emergency is over.”\textsuperscript{122}

It is clear from the local coverage of the lynching that it was considered justifiable based on the criminal reputation of the victim, Wildrick. His position as a criminal in society was used to justify the need to take the law into their own hands within the community for the sake of their protection. This is substantiated by the court case records that survive from the era involving Wildrick. Cases from Sauk County, specifically in regards to the robbery of Gates, are evidence of Wildrick’s existence within the criminal court system and substantiate the claims by the newspaper of his history.

The same opinion can be inferred regarding the lynching of William Spain. Spain was a much disliked Irishman, Civil War veteran and could be described as bitter and unpopular.\textsuperscript{123} Spain had previously lived in Adams County; on September 22, 1869 the \textit{Adams County Press} published an article entitled “Mobbed and Hung” recounting Spain’s demise:

To say that he has received his just deserts would be giving countenance to the manner in which justice has been done to many victims of this base man. We have known him by reputation for many years, and in all the time do not think of a single good deed to lighten the load of guilt he has been gathering over his head, meriting the punishment he has received at the hands of the people.\textsuperscript{124}

Other papers who recounted the events leading up to the murder of Barney Britt and the subsequent lynching of Spain painted a similar picture of dislike for Spain but also detailed the grievances between Spain and Britt. Both men were Irishman and were

\textsuperscript{122} Alanson, \textit{A Week of Excitement}, 1.
\textsuperscript{123} Current, 525
\textsuperscript{124} "Mobbed and Hung," \textit{Adams County Press} (Adams, WI), September 22, 1869.
members of Company D, Nineteenth Wisconsin Volunteers. During the Civil War, Spain rose to Captain and Britt a private. It was during their time together in the military that Britt claimed that Spain abused him and "they scarcely ever met without some words ensuing." The article went into detail describing both men and their reputation in the community. Spain was described as a man "with some ability and shrewdness but unfortunately for himself could hardly control his temper when excited."  

125 Britt was described as an "unlettered man" and before the war addicted to alcohol and at times very quarrelsome. However, after returning from the war, he apparently quit drinking and had been remarkably well behaved and industrious. He worked as a janitor at the courthouse and had recently purchased a farm.  

126 These descriptions help justify the lynching of Spain and excuse the use of extralegal justice based on his notoriety as an angry disagreeable man. Specifically reporting that Britt was in the midst of trying to make an honest living after having had previous troubles adds to the paper’s viewpoint, in summary: they [the paper] condemn the actions of Spain and usually condemn the violence that followed however, if someone agitated the members of this community enough, he would be safer somewhere else given the temper of the local people.

Spain and Wildrick’s Irish ancestry did not play a part in their lynching. Spain’s temper and disagreeable manner may have been associated as a stereotype with his Irish background but not the sole reason, or at any point, a justification for his lynching. This

125 "Murder and Lynch Law; Barney Britt Shot! William H. Spain, the Murderer Hung by the Excited Populace! An Exciting Day in Portage!" The Mauston Star (Mauston), September 23, 1869.
126 Ibid.
was pointed out in Current’s book *the History of Wisconsin* where the author noted that mostly fellow Irishman made up the mob that hung Spain.127

Though locally it appears that the lynching was supported by the community at large and the local newspapers, outside of the area, specifically Milwaukee and other nationwide news outlets wholly condemned the use of extralegal justice even though they recognized the criminal background of Wildrick. Such articles were published in the *New York Times* and *Daily News*.

- **May 1871, Louis Nohr, Oconto, Oconto County, WI**

The accounts of the lynching of Louis Nohr vary in detail, each offering small and separate details. The account that was utilized in the previous chapter was provided by the Oconto County Historical Society and can be found online. It is a recounting of events in the years after the lynching from a member of the community.128

The lynching of Louis Nohr was not directly the result of his ethnicity. He was not lynched because he was German. However, ethnicity played a part in the situation that lead to his demise. Men who were not of German decent attempted to gain entry to an event that was meant for those of German heritage. Their rejection and the reaction of Nohr are what lead to the brawl and the attack of Dennis White and the murder of Joseph Ruelle. In addition, their ethnicity was secondary to the fact that there was a lack of faith in the justice system present in the community coupled with the perceived questionable

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128 The primary sources gathered for this analysis are newspaper articles from around the country, each referencing a main article printed in the *Green Bay Gazette*. However, each article, though drawing from one main account, differ.
background of the lynched played a larger role in his death then his ethnic background did.

Limited census records exist for the specific individuals associated with the lynching. From what has been gathered Louis Nohr was of German descent, possibly born in Wurttemberg and a member of the working class, listed as a laborer on the 1870 census and described as a butcher in the various retellings of events that evening.129 Dennis White, the first man injured via knife by Nohr, was a raftsman and according to the 1870 Census was born in New Brunswick.130 One newspaper account described White, though not by name, as Irish: “Nohr...got into an altercation with an Irishman in the Hall, and drawing a sabre, struck at him.”131 The second victim, Joseph Ruelle, whom Nohr killed, was listed on the 1870 Census as being born in Belgium.132 It is referenced in the same article that noted White as an Irishman, that the group of men trying to enter the dance hall were of other nationalities “a number of young men of other nationalities went in and were proceeding to join in the festivities when, those who had charge of the dance made some objection and one of the managers requested them to leave.”133 Though it is not specifically stated anywhere that Nohr was upset by the nationalities of the men who tried to enter the dance it may have been factor given it was an event hosted by a German organization.

131 "Lynch Law in Wisconsin." The Indiana Progress (Indiana, PA), June 22, 1871.
133 "Lynch Law in Wisconsin," 1.
As has been evident in the other lynching accounts, the use of Louis’s criminal background to villainize him and provide justification for his murder is apparent. Similar to the account of the Nevel lynching in Richland Center, the newspaper accounts of the lynching of Nohr paint Ruelle in a positive light contrasting his perceived virtuousness with Nohr’s brutishness. For example: “there was no sympathy for the prisoner, man, woman, and child high and low, were satisfied he ought to die. It is currently reported that he had acknowledged he had killed others elsewhere, and this was the third of fourth murder he committed”\textsuperscript{134} Another article stated: “Nier was a desperate character, and shot a man in Green Bay about a year ago”\textsuperscript{135} and another described his last words as “not to be of the most religious, but because of the great excitement, it is impossible to say anything positive in retaliation to that.”\textsuperscript{136} One article went so far as to describe Nohr’s physicality in a negative way “he will be recognized as a short, fleshy man, wearing huge spectacles who has been engaged in various other affrays here. He always carried a revolver and a huge dirk knife. He had but few if any intimates among the Germans here.”\textsuperscript{137} Joseph Ruelle on the other hand was described as “a young man of pleasant manners, popular with all, and a just pride to his parents”\textsuperscript{138} and by another source as “a quiet, civil young man, about twenty years of age, very generally known and esteemed.”\textsuperscript{139} 

The “who” of those involved in the lynch mob and the numbers who participated varies. One account from the \textit{Cincinnati Enquirer} described “it is estimated that about

\textsuperscript{134} "Civilization in Wisconsin: A Pleasant Party of "Respected Citizens" Lynch a Murderer." \textit{The Evening Telegraph} (Philadelphia, PA), June 10, 1871.
\textsuperscript{135} "Lynch Law in Wisconsin," \textit{The Orville Crescent} (Orville, OH), June 6, 1871.
\textsuperscript{136} "The Oconto Murder and Lynching," \textit{The Janesville Daily Gazette} (Janesville, WI), June 7, 1871.
\textsuperscript{137} "Murder at Oconto," \textit{Green Bay Advocate} (Green Bay, WI), June 1, 1871.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} “Lynch Law in Wisconsin,” 1.
one thousand persons witnessed the dreadful scene. The ringleaders of the mob consisted of about twenty or thirty men.”

In the same article it also stated that the body was never buried, but instead “thrown into a saw dust pit and burned in order to prevent implication of any of the parties by reason of inquest.” Another article cut the number of one thousand in half and estimated that “a crowd of about five hundred men, led by the father of the murdered boy surrounded the jail, broke open the doors, dragged the murderer a short distance though the streets and hung him.”

One article stated that the lynchers “were all mill men, the citizens taking no part.” Before his lynching Nohr was to be transported to the jail in Brown County, on account “of the insecurity of our present miserable structure” according to the *Janesville Gazette*. However, the mob did not allow Nohr to board the transport that was to take him. The mob made several attempts to break into the jail until finally he was apprehended later that evening.

News outlets condemned the lynching of Nohr including *New York Times* and a rather scathing article from the *Janesville Gazette*:

The fearful occurrences in Oconto...regrettably to call attention to the spirit therein displayed of contempt for all law and all the forums of administering justice. A passionate, headstrong man, whose passions are doubtless inflamed with strong drink, commits a heinous crime known to the statutes that of taking swiftly and surely his fellow’s life when immediately the seven devils that had possession of him pass into a crowd of men “not” as out informant says “not composed of roughs but of respectable citizens of Oconto” when a scene of shocking barbarity ensues that would put to the blush a band of cannibals, or Ashantee savages.

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140 "Hung on the Nearest Tree," *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH), June 8, 1871.
141 "Lynch Law - A Murderer Taken out of Jail at Oconto and Hung," *The Pantograph* (Bloomington, IL), June 6, 1871.
142 "Lynch Law in Wisconsin," 1.
The article further condemned the misuse of justice:

There can be no justification, no possible excuse for this glaring crime of community in wresting from the law its prerogative of determining the amount and character of punishment for the crime committed which is the safeguard of society against its repetition...the mob took into its own hands without reason without justice without the shadow of an excuse in blind rage all the functions of judge jury and executioner.\textsuperscript{144}

Based on the research conducted thus far, no one was tried for the lynching of Louis Nohr.

- **October 1875, Isiah and Amos Courtwright, Stevens Point, Portage County, WI.**

  The lynching of Isiah and Amos Courtwright provides the most primary and secondary sources for the lynchings discussed thus far and names the individuals involved in orchestrating the lynch mob. The names of those involved in the lynch mob are known because of accounts written by a local citizen proceeding the lynching. With these names a clearer picture of the social standing of the mob members is painted in addition to the Courtwright’s own position within the community. This evidence justifies why community members deemed it necessary to use extralegal violence to enact justice.

  Neither race or ethnicity were factors in the lynchings of the Courtwrights.\textsuperscript{145} Instead a criminal history and their social standing within the community played the biggest role. Sheriff Baker was born in Maine, and his wife was born in Ohio.\textsuperscript{146} At the time of his death Sheriff Baker was serving a second term as Sheriff and was a farmer by

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Sources such as census records for the Courtwrights or any other documents that would provide further verification of this statement were not found.
trade; previously he worked as a river pilot. Baker and Amos Courtwright were neighbors before Baker left to serve as a private and eventually to Lieutenant during the Civil War.

Amos and Isiah Courtwright were farmers and lived in rural Portage County. As descriptions of the brothers indicate they were in trouble with the law before Sheriff Baker was killed on October 11, 1875. The cause for the confrontation between the Courtwrights and Sheriff Baker resulted from a business dealing between Amos and Hanchett and the mortgage liens on the estate that Hanchett looked to recover. Amos’s inability to pay off these liens led to the lengthy and hostile court proceedings and notice of eviction. According to the *Stevens Point Journal* published after the death of Baker, the previous May, the Courtwrights made repeated threats to shoot Sheriff Baker if he should try and remove them from the property. The paper indicated they interviewed Sheriff Baker regarding the matter with the Courtwrights of which he [Baker] said that:

Amos and his wife had both threatened to shoot him [Baker] when he came – they had told him that they would do it. This conversation took place in this city, Mr. Baker reasoning with them, and telling them that he had discretion in the matter; that as an officer it was his duty to execute any process placed in his hands and “if you kill me” said Baker “it will make no difference in the end, other officers will take my place, and the command of the court will be obeyed though it takes every man in Portage County to enforce it”.

After the confrontation Sheriff Baker rounded up a small posse and proceeded to the Courtwrights where he met no resistance. The Courtwrights, along with their possessions, were removed from the home, and the home was given over to a Mr. Richardson. Undeterred and determined to retain ownership of their home, the following June the Richardson’s horses were stolen by the Courtwrights during the night, and taken.

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147 "Murdered. Full Details of the Killing of Sheriff Baker," *Stevens Point Journal* (Stevens Point, WI), October 16, 1875.
seven miles away and were found tied to a tree. While the Richardsons and other help looked for the horses Amos and his family moved back into the home. Upon returning the Richardsons had Amos and his wife arrested for trespassing. While the Richardsons moved back into the home, the Courtwrights took out a warrant for the Richardson’s arrest. Amos then went to the homestead armed with a shotgun and fired upon the premises. No one was hurt in the gunfire and the Richardsons retained the residence until September. While the Richardson’s were out on an errand the Courtwrights moved in and remained until the shooting of Sheriff Baker in October. Amos was described as a “man of intransigent nature, often at odds with his fellow man” and his brother Isaiah “along with six other men were cited by the Common Council in 1869 as being spendthrifts who, through the use of intoxicating liquors, were injuring their health and destroying the peace of their families and disturbing the quiet of the city”. Following this incident licensed establishments within the city were forbidden to sell them liquor.148

The Stevens Point Journal uses the same approach as the previous newspapers in the other lynching analysis:

yet the Courtwrights had carried out their murderous threats. An innocent officer has been shot down in cold blood while in the discharge of a duty over which he had no control. A mother has been widowed and four helpless children made fatherless. A faithful officer, kind hearted neighbor, an honest man, as innocent of any wrong in this matter as a babe, had been shot in cold blood by a concealed foe.

The paper notes that it was not surprising that the idea of revenge was in everybody’s thoughts. The Plover Times offers a similar sentiment in their telling of the

death of Sheriff Baker, though there had been previous threats by the Courtwrights on
Sheriff Baker’s life “many were slow to believe that the Courtwrights could work
themselves up to such a state of devilish ferocity as to shoot, in cold blood and
deliberately, an officer who was simply trying to do his official duty.”

Papers in surrounding communities such as Wausau and Grand Rapids (now
known as Wisconsin Rapids) were quick to condemn the lynching of the Courtwright
brothers. The Wausau Pilot stated that though the murder of Sheriff Baker was a tragic
event the lynching was “a thousand times more fiendish and the blood stains and
damning stigma of this most foul, cowardly and brutal murder will be felt by the people
of this valley for long years to come”.

However, the Stevens Point Journal, at first made an attempt to condemn the act
of lynching stating “all, no matter what their crime, are entitled to an impartial trial” later
back tracked and stated “other murders have been committed in this country and too often
the perpetrators of them have gone scott free or received in adequate punishments. This
fact, probably had great weight in influencing the lynching party to take law into their
own hands.”

A surprising comment on the lynching and its justification came from Sheriff
Baker’s youngest son who was born six months after his father’s death. He wrote a letter
in 1944 to the editor of the Stevens Point Journal. He said that what he knew of the death
of his father and the lynchings came from his mother and various men who felt free to

149 H. G Ingersoll, ed., "A Shocking Murder! Death of Sheriff Baker; Intense Excitement," The
Plover Times, October 15, 1875.
150 "Lynched. A Masked Mob Take the Courtwrights from the Jail and Hang Them," Stevens Point Journal
(Stevens Point, WI), October 23, 1875.

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talk of it. Based on what he was told by his mother his father “felt that in the long court proceedings the Courtwrights had been wronged, he believed they had made all payments demanded of them but they were ignorant men unacquainted with the legal forms of receipts, deeds and mortgages and mortgage releases that would have made their possession of the farm in Buena Viata absolute.”

The younger Baker discussed the lynching and made promises to reveal the fellows involved in the lynching and other points of interest in the case. He said he would not do this until October of 1975 because decedents of the murdered Courtwrights still survived and it might bring them pain. Interestingly, the younger Baker early in his letter promised the names of those involved in the lynching mob. Later he seemed to justify the actions of the mob by saying “the Courtwrights sentenced my mother to many years of poverty and hard labor to support herself and family, and as one of that family I think they deserved what they got.”

Following the lynching there were nine arrests but none were for those involved with the lynching. The arrests included Mrs. Courtwright, and her two oldest children Marcella and Rodney, Asa Gould, Calvin Jones and H. Jones. The first six were charged with murder and the last three charged as accessories after the fact. The children were eventually released but Mrs. Courtwright and Oliver Cross both stood trial. They were acquitted and released.

The men involved with the lynching were identified in a journal kept by a man by the name of Simon Augustus Sherman. Sherman came to Plover from the east in 1848

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151 Jason H. Baker, “Letter, 1944,” Jason H. Baker to Editor of Stevens Point Journal and Mr. Wallace, September 4, 1944, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point, Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

152 Ibid, 3.

153 Archives and Area Research Center, University Library – Stevens Point, WI, University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, State of Wisconsin v. Sophia Courtwright (C.C Portage County 1875).
and was a successful owner of a sawmill on the Wisconsin River.\textsuperscript{154} Sherman recorded the happenings of his business and the community within his diaries which consisted of small notebooks written in pencil. His first notation connected to the lynching was dated October 11, 1875, “Jo Baker Sheriff shot and others by Courtwrights.”\textsuperscript{155} The next notation dated October 14\textsuperscript{th} Sherman stated that he attended the funeral of Sheriff Jo Baker who was shot by the Courtwrights and that it was the “largest funeral ever been in town”. The first note of the lynching is on October 19, 1875, Sherman wrote “two Courtwrights hung at three o’clock in morning by mob” and later the same day he wrote “this morning at two o’clock Isiah and Amos Courtwright were lynched by a mob, Jack Finch, Ed Metcalf, leaders; John Morrison and Mort Strope teamsters, Sid Carpenter, Harry Rice, Bill Welton, Lif Bean, Geo Wilmot, Jo Petus, and Shepard and two more.”\textsuperscript{156} Later in his October 31, 1875, Sherman wrote that he went to Plover and got the names of the murderers of the Courtwrights: “N. T. Moore gives me the names of the mob who lynched the Courtwrights, Jack Finch, captain, Bill Baker, turnkey, Ed Metcalf, John Morrison, and team, Jo Petis, Sid Carpenter, Geo Wilmont, Lif Lef Bean, Harry Rice, Geo Donavan, Wm. Welton, Wm. Shepard, Ed Ward, Whiteny and Whelock, M. Strope.”\textsuperscript{157} In all Sherman listed sixteen men. Sherman wrote in later entries in November that he met with others to discuss the lynching and even conversed with Mrs. Courtwright.

Those involved with the lynching were of the area and for all intents and purposes considered good standing citizens of the community. The obituary of Sid Carpenter

\textsuperscript{154} Malcom Rosholt, \textit{A Double Lynching} (Stevens Point, WI: Portage County Historical Society), n.d.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., October 19, 1875.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., October 31, 1875.
published on May 31, 1905, in the Stevens Point Daily Journal begins with the headline of “Death relieves long suffering of well-known citizen.” According to the obituary Mr. Carpenter died in his sleep and had been suffering from heart problems for the past year and “few can understand the suffering which he so patiently endured.” Carpenter was born in New York and came to Wisconsin in 1835, settling in Plover and later serving during the Civil War moving up the ranks “nearly making it to major.” Upon return he worked as a clerk at a local store and hotel and was later in charge of the Green Bay and Western Section crew for the railroad and later janitor at the court house. Carpenter’s son was a State Assemblyman and his brother was a judge. Sidney was described as “a man of strong will and rather abrupt address but he was warm hearted, sympathetic and generous.”\textsuperscript{158} Another accomplice to the lynching was Jo Pettis whose obituary published on January 1, 1910 in the Stevens Point Daily Journal is much shorter than Carpenter’s but describes him as a “large and powerful man and in his younger days was regarded as one of the strongest men in the county.”\textsuperscript{159} The obituary for another accomplice, Ed Metcalf, printed in the Stevens Point Daily Journal on July 11, 1899, describes him as a local pioneer and “one of the substantial and most highly respected residents of the county. His home was noted for hospitality.”\textsuperscript{160} Further descriptions of the men can be found in the writing of Malcom Rosholt. In his publication, “A Double Lynching”, the leader of the lynching party, John Finch, was described as one of the pioneers of the county who later ran for Sheriff and served as Chief of Police in 1886-1887 and again in 1889-1891; he was appointed as postmaster in Stevens Point.

\textsuperscript{158} Obituary for Sidney Carpenter, Stevens Point Daily Journal (Stevens Point, WI), May 31, 1905.
\textsuperscript{159} Obituary for Joseph W. Pettis, Stevens Point Daily Journal (Stevens Point, WI), January 6, 1910.
\textsuperscript{160} Obituary for E. H. Metcalf, Stevens Point Daily Journal (Stevens Point, WI), July 6, 1910.
Based on the selected obituaries of the men involved with the lynching it is evident that they were not only well respected in their community, but they held prominent positions of influence or were associated with members of influence. These men were considered upstanding members of society. In their obituaries no mention of their supposed involvement or orchestration of the lynching was made. The murder committed by the Courtwrights not only led to their demise, but also defined their legacy. The men who took the lives of the Courtwright brothers bore no outward or public condemnation for their acts. Clearly, social standing of the participants who orchestrated the lynching played a part: they were considered pillars in their community and stationed above the victims which gave them the attitude of superiority and enough power in society to escape punishment.

The lynching and its aftermath continued well into the twentieth century. Besides the 1944 letter written by Sheriff Baker’s son, community members still remembered the lynching. Decades after the Courtwrights murder, a member of the Village Board of Plover suggested that the village should name a park near McDill dam “Courtwright Park.” According to the information provided in Rohsolt’s book, A Double Lynching, the board member was later criticized; he thought the Courtwrights never had their day in court and that they had been wronged. However, another board member thought that Sheriff Baker also was wronged and it would be improper to name the new park after the Courtwrights because they shot an officer of the law in the act of duty.\(^{161}\) Community remorse was substantiated by an article published in 1974 further stating that the Courtwrights specifically Amos “were respectable citizens” and “after a century of

\(^{161}\) Rohsolt, A Double Lynching, 137.
reflection possibly the Courtwrights should be brought back to respectability."\textsuperscript{162}
Furthermore, Sheriff Baker is currently listed within a register created on the Officer Down Memorial Page whose purpose is to remember those law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty. Noting that one of the comments posted in 2007 under the memorial reads "this writer is pleased that justice was quickly served on his behalf".

\textsuperscript{162} "Lynched Brothers May Get Belated Apology" \textit{Neenah-Menasha Daily Northwestern} (Oshkosh, WI), June 20, 1974.
Conclusion

Wisconsin’s lynchings between the years of 1861 and 1875 share similarities with the lynchings that occurred elsewhere in the United States, specifically the South. However, there are unique traits that set Wisconsin apart and make it unique, specifically, the apparent inability of the local communities to handle the people who did not conform to the status quo and intolerance for misbehavior.

One of the central ideas behind Manfred Berg’s book, *A History of Lynching in America*, is that extralegal justice was used as a means of social control and assertion of power by a majority over those on fringes of the social order. Ashraf Rushdy echoes a similar sentiment in *American Lynching*: “the practice of lynching developed in tandem with the new settlements, ultimately becoming a weapon of terrorism used to control the mobility of particular groups ...defined along ethnic, racial or class lines.”\(^{163}\) The argument of lynchings prohibiting upward mobility and as a way to control the lower rungs of society is evidence in the lynchings of Isiah and Amos Courtwright in Portage County. Isiah and Amos were working class and, as by Sheriff Baker’s widow recalled, the Sheriff himself saw the Courtwright’s as “ignorant men”. The lynchings of John Nevel, Patrick Wildrick, and Louis Nohr exhibit a shared class characteristic: they were all working class, some with criminal histories that made it easy to justify their eradication from society.

Rough justice as described by Pfeiffer was a “collective belief of groups, or enthusiasts, in the Midwest, West and South who were opposed to the middle class

\(^{163}\) Rushdy, 39.
reformers who advocated for due-process law as a guarantor of social order and the free flow of capital.\textsuperscript{164} The lynchers who believed in the notion of rough justice shared a commitment to a belief that focused on harsh, personal, informal and communally supervised punishment of what was perceived as serious criminal behavior. This was not the case in the lynchings of the men in Wisconsin.

The lynchings in Wisconsin share similar characteristics to the idea of rough justice: the citizenry who allowed the lynchings to happen, or carried out the act, had reached a threshold in their disdain for the inefficiency of the established code of law. This was specifically mentioned in the newspaper accounts for the Nevel and Nohr lynchings. They were personal given that they were direct retribution for a specific deed. But the lynchings were not specifically an act of rough justice or do they follow the overall idea of “rough justice” held by the local citizenry. In the book by Frederick Allen entitled \textit{A Decent Orderly Lynching} Allen describes a similar form of vigilante justice used in Montana. Between the years of 1864 and 1870 a group made up of civilians hung local citizens who were public nuisances. After territorial courts were in place the vigilantes refused to disband and continued to lynch people without trials.\textsuperscript{165}

Wisconsin’s lynching was not a part of rough justice; and though the mobs that killed these men could be described as vigilante’s they were not established groups that remained in place for a long period of time to continue to carry out their idea of justice. Wisconsin had been a state for thirteen years when Marshal Clarke was lynched. Each Wisconsin community where one of the lynchings took place had an established criminal


justice system made up of local police enforcement; each community was part of a local and state court system. The lynchings were not informal; they were planned and executed by residents in the community who, under normal circumstances, followed the established code of law. These people, in fact, participated in upholding the established code of law or socialized within groups of those who did. Lynching was not utilized on a regular basis in Wisconsin as a consequence for specific crimes; it was instead utilized as a reaction when a threshold was reached within the community. This threshold was met because of the community’s inability to deal with difficult parties, a mistrust in due process and an intolerance for misbehaviors.

Those who participated in the lynchings were not society’s outsiders living on the fringes: they were what many would consider “normal” everyday people, many of whom, as in the case of Amos and Isiah Courtwright, were well known, respected citizens within the community. They were not and organized vigilante group that operated on a regular basis. Not only were those who orchestrated the murders everyday citizens, but so were those who allowed it to happen and go unpunished. The people who were lynched by mobs were scapegoats for these communities. An element of collective anger, be it from a lack of faith in the justice system based on previous inequalities to convict or the actions of the lynched, incited a collective anger. What makes Wisconsin unique and different than the national status quo is the reaction of these citizens to the scapegoats and their inability to tolerate difficult people.

Of the Wisconsin lynchings in this study only two were of non-white individuals. As Brundage indicated, lynching was a main form of upholding the southern honor code: a code that required white men to respond to challenges to their honor and defend white
feminine virtue. Lynching in the south was used as a tool of intimidation to control the black populace after the abolition of slavery. This use of lynching is different than what occurred in Wisconsin. Only one victim was African American and one Native American. The other lynchings appear to have been used as a means of social control and were not because of the victim’s race. The lynching of Clark appeared to be outside the Wisconsin trend. His lynching resulted from a combination of ethnic solidarity and race. Racially motivated lynchings were occurring in other parts of the Midwest. James Madison specifically pointed this out in his analysis of the lynchings of Abram Smith and Tom Shipp in 1930’s Indiana and in Duluth in 1880. Lynchings also occurred in the Midwest states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois as described in Pfeiffer’s *Lynching beyond Dixie*.

Michael Pfeiffer argued that after the Civil War rebuilding the nation was not just a southern process but a national one that included the adaptation to changes in the social, political and economic activities including the acceptance of the newly granted rights to African Americans. The response to these changes caused friction amongst working class whites in the north specifically the Irish Catholics. This is evident in the lynching of Marshall Clarke in Milwaukee. The newly immigrated Irish Catholics had to compete with the newly freed African Americans for social status and jobs in northern society. The tension between the two groups came to a head with the conflict between Clarke and Darbey Carney in 1861. Ethnic solidarity of the Irish in Milwaukee, coupled with race prejudice, killed Clarke. In other cases, such as Nevel, ethnic solidarity was involved but not race.
The combination of a mistrust of the legal system, ethnic solidarity, and social control are all evidenced in the lynchings in Wisconsin in the fourteen-year period between 1861 and 1875. The use of the print media to expound these justifications were utilized in each case. Wisconsin’s lynchings are unique compared to those in the other parts of the Midwest and Southern United States, because they lacked the use of race as a motive, excluding the Milwaukee lynching. It is important to understand this particular history of Wisconsin and the United States. As the author Berg states “no other western nation entertains such a wide ranging tolerance for private violence including the broad concept of legitimate self-defense and unrestricted access to firearms”. 166 Though an actual lynching has not occurred in the state of Wisconsin since 1891, the justification for the violence that exists today in the form of self-defense, police brutality, bullying and sensationalized media, mirrors the same arguments that were made well over one hundred and forty years ago.

166 Berg, 194.
Appendixes

Fig. 1. Lynchings that occurred in 1861 thru 1875 are indicated in Red.
Fig. 2. Stereograph image of the body of Schuyler Gates. H.H. Bennett, *Dead Body of Schuyler Gates*, 1869, H.H. Bennett Studio, Wisconsin Dells, WI.

Fig. 4. Sherman Augustus Diary, October 19, 1875. Simon Sherman Augustus, *Simon Augustus Sherman Papers 1824-1906*, Diary, 1848, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.
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