



## Police officer mortally wounded in Shantytown

City lawman breaks up brawl, manages to place suspect under arrest after being shot



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**Cumberland Police Officer August Baker's beat included the Shantytown area of the city. It was here that he was fatally shot by William Burns in 1907.**

*Editor's note: This is the first of two articles about shooting of August Baker, which led to Cumberland's only lynching.*

There's no harm in a drink once in a while or so the saying goes, but those harmless little drinks once cost two men their lives, nearly ruined a hospital, nearly killed one man and got another man beaten up.

Not that unusual for an evening in Shantytown.

William Burns and Jesse Page were winding down from their workdays on Thursday, Oct. 4, 1907. They headed down to Wineow Street in the Shantytown section of Cumberland. They stopped in Kate Preston's Saloon and ordered themselves drinks.

It wasn't long before both men were a bit tipsy. Jesse's attention was pulled to another



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area of the bar and he wandered away from William.

No one would later remember how the argument began but it ended with William getting into a fight with another person at the bar. The fight continued outside of the bar on the pavement.

The fight caught the attention of Cumberland Police Officer August Baker, who

was walking his beat along Wineow Street.

Baker broke up the fight but William was still belligerent and trying to fight. Baker decided to arrest him but William resisted arrest.

James Hussey, a bartender at J.M. Fields Saloon was in the doorway watching the fight, which had ended up outside of his doors. He reported that Baker raised his club and threatened to hit William if he did not go along to the station peacefully.

William pulled a revolver and shot Baker about an inch below his heart.

"You dirty dog. You shot me," Baker said.



# Looking back: Scuffle leads to shooting

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Despite his wound, Baker still managed to club and handcuff William before he passed out. Humphrey Green, a bystander, stood over William, making sure he didn't run away until Officer John Trieber arrived.

Robert King and Officer O'Neill rushed Baker to the Baltimore Street entrance of the Western Maryland Hospital.

O'Neill told Nurse Kenney about the incident and asked for a stretcher to bring in Baker. Kenney told him that there was one in the hallway he could use. She called the hospital superintendent who told her to call in a surgeon and get the operating room ready.

When she went back to see Baker and admit him, he was gone. O'Neill had only seen a wheelchair in the hallway,

which could not have gotten Baker up the stairs and into the hospital. Faced with that, O'Neill and King took Baker to Allegany Hospital where he was admitted.

Baker was operated on but the outlook was not good. By 8 p.m. Friday night, his pulse was weak and his breathing heavy. By midnight, he had lapsed into a coma which he came out of only once briefly.

The Cumberland Daily News reported, "During that brief period of consciousness he complained of fearful agony. By his side was his faithful wife, although during the last few hours he was unconscious of her presence."

He died about 3:30 a.m. on Saturday morning.

His funeral was held Monday afternoon and presided over by Rev. C. F. Floto of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church. Baker was buried in Greenmont Cemetery.

On Wednesday, the Cumberland Mayor and City Council launched an inquiry into the management of Western Maryland Hospital "in consequence of a seeming manifestation of unconcern, lack of facilities or possible failure to conform with certain red tape regulation promulgated by the management, those ministering to the dying officer felt compelled to go elsewhere," reported the newspaper.

The hospital was eventually cleared of any negligence.

Jesse surrendered himself to police and was nearly lynched alongside William, but it is what happened to William that became the shame of Cumberland.

*James Rada is a Times-News Staff writer. The Looking Back column will appear frequently. It is derived from Times-News files and other sources. If you have a story you would like to see in Looking Back, contact James at 301-784-2523 or [jrada@times-news.com](mailto:jrada@times-news.com).*





# Citizens take law into their own hands

## Angry mob storms jail, kills man who had murdered Cumberland lawman

*Editor's Note: This is the second of two articles about the shooting of August Baker, which led to Cumberland's only lynching.*

A police officer was dead but his murderer had been caught and put in jail. That wasn't enough for some people.

They wanted an eye for an eye. Blood for blood. A life for a life.

William Burns shot Cumberland Police Officer August Baker in Shantytown on Thursday, Oct. 4, 1907. Baker died early Saturday morning at Allegany Hospital.

His death started people talking about making sure the murderer met his maker. The Cumberland Daily News reported, "It was not given credence in public circles, upon the presumption that as there had never been a lynching in Cumberland."

Never say never.

On Saturday around 10:30 p.m.,

men came in twos and threes and gathered at the intersection of Johnson and Greene streets at the base of the hill below the jail. Lookouts were posted on Prospect Square to make sure there were no police nearby.



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Deputy Sheriff Noah Hendley heard a rap at the door of the jail. He looked out an upstairs window and saw a mob of about 200 men filling the street in front of the jail.

"Come down and open the door," someone called.

Hendley knew a mob when he saw one and he knew they were up to no

good. "I will do nothing of the kind and I will shoot the first man who steps inside the door," he said.

"Batter down the door," people in the mob began to call.

About 50 men rushed down the hill to Greene Street where a telegraph pole lay. They hefted it onto their shoulders and carried it up the steep incline.

They rammed the pole against the wooden doors of the jail. From inside, Hendley aimed his pistol at the door and pleaded with them to let the law take its course.

Amid cheers and hand clapping, the wooden double doors splintered. The mob surged inside. Hendley was overpowered and disarmed. The mob tore at his clothing and threatened his life.

The mob tried to use the pole to

open the steel corridor doors open that led to the prisoner's exercise room. Unlike the front doors, these doors held. The mobbers searched Hendley and found the keys to open the door.

They searched every cell looking for Burns. Frightened inmates obliged them and pointed out that Burns' cell was the last cell on the right hand side of the corridor.

They mobbers choked the narrow corridor. They fought to pry open the old lock but it held. After 10 minutes, they gave up and used the telegraph pole to hammer it open.

Inside the cell, Burns cowered speechlessly in the shadows of his cell. The mobbers grabbed him and carried him along toward the outer



# Citizens: Mob takes action into own hands

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doors. When he resisted, he was punched. When he fell, he was dragged, first head first and then feet first down the steps of the jail to the cobbled street.

As the mob emptied from the jail, Hendley went back to see the damage and if anyone else had been hurt. What he found was that the 26 prisoners were slowly being asphyxiated. In the mob's eagerness to batter down the door to Burn's cell, they had also broken the gas pipes in the room.

Hendley sealed them as best he could and then opened all of the windows in the jail to ventilate the room.

Outside, the Rev. William Cleveland Hicks from Emmanuel Episcopal Church had heard the tumult and came to see what was happening. Dressed in his cassock, he stood on the jail steps with his hands held high, pleading with the men to obey the law of God and man and disperse.

"The mob had apparently provided no rope as when it was suggested that the body be dragged to the West Virginia bridge and strung up, no hemp was forthcoming," reported the newspaper.

The mobbers kicked at Burns and tore at his clothing. Then a shot rang out, quickly followed by at least a dozen more.

"The men who fired the bullets stood right in the glare of the electric light, one alone firing the contents of a seven-shooter into the fallen form of Burns," reported the newspaper.

Some of the mobbers had masked their faces with handkerchiefs, other blackened

their faces, but many made no attempt at concealment.

Even after Burns lay dead, the mobbers continued to kick him and shoot him.

"Burn him! Burn him!" some of the mobbers cried.

Matches were struck and the search for flammable material began.

Hicks pleaded for the mob not to violate the body anymore. "The deed done, the mob seemed to listen to Rev. Hicks' plea for mercy and many began to edge away from the scene," reported the Cumberland Daily News.

Judge Hunter Boyd arrived on the scene shortly after Hicks. Seeing some response to Hicks' plea, Boyd moved to the center of the crowd and launched into a speech condemning the mob's actions. At the conclusion of his speech the mob applauded him and hundreds began to withdraw from the scene.

"While the lynching was in progress and the mob was forcing entrance into the jail, Mr. B.A. Richmond and a number of citizens endeavored to get the police to the jail, but as they were scattered all over the city, from the Narrows to Virginia Lane patrolling their beats, it was fully an hour before the first squad arrived, long after the mob had done its awful work and the blood-smeared form of the dead Negro lay in the street directly opposite the jail doors," reported the newspaper.

Louis Stein, the undertaker, arrived soon after the police, but it took another hour before he was able to get help to load the body and take it away to his funeral home.

Spectators and curiosity seekers took pieces of Burns'

clothing and blood-covered stones as mementos of the event. Later, a crowd of 10,000 people, including Sunday school children, paraded through Stein's funeral home to see the body.

Boyd asked for an investigation of the lynching Tuesday. He told the grand jury, "I say that anyone connected with that occurrence was guilty of murder and nothing else but murder.

"When Officer Baker had received a mortal wound, what did he do? He turned the man over to officers of the law. Officer Baker's memory has been insulted. Officer Baker was fearless, brave and upright. Yet he wanted the law to take its course and the mob's action was a reflection upon the good officer's memory. The action of the mob was contrary to practice of the law."

The county commissioners offered a \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest and convictions of any of the mobbers, but no one ever came forward.

"It is said that some of the lynchers are known and that the mob included several prominent citizens who have never been known to carry revolvers, but who did so upon this occasion," reported the newspaper.

At first it appeared Burns would be buried in a pauper's grave, but his sister eventually came to Cumberland from Pittsburgh to claim the body of the victim of Cumberland's only lynching.

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