

WASHINGTON COUNTY, ARKANSAS COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT SUMMARY
MEMORIALIZING AARON AND ANTHONY LYNCHED ON JULY 7, 1856

Margaret – the African American Story about the Boone Event brings into the question the legitimacy of the entire legal process. For years the Equal Justice Initiative championed exonerating falsely accused Black people of all sorts of crime that they did not commit. I feel the new information about the Boone Event places us in a space where we still do not have the whole story. Was Randall even guilty of committing the crime for which he was hanged or was his hanging also a lynching? We must decide whether we want to find the whole truth or leave speculation as historical basis.

Monday, July 7, 1856 A crowd I believe it should be named that a white crowd because Black people have always been human beings and merely not mentioning that is talking only to white people in this country (Black people will read this and we should not make them assume) was gathering at the Washington County courthouse in Fayetteville, Arkansas, many of whom Wouldn't this be primarily Richland township people not just "many of whom?" were from Richland Township. A county circuit court trial for three enslaved African American men accused of the murder of James Monroe Boone had just concluded after several days of deliberation. Those assembled from the white community of Richland Township- were there people assembled from the Black Community? were outraged by the trial's outcome. They had no argument with the guilty verdict of Randall, who had been sentenced to die at the hand of the stateState. They were loath, however, to accept the outcome for Aaron and Anthony, whose charges had been dismissed. The verbal exchanges grew increasingly heated. The district court judge and the grand jury foreman (who were the district judge and forman? Were they relatives of the Boones?) implored the crowd to honor the court's decisions; they could tell their words and those of a very few other like-minded folks were falling on deaf ears. Why do you say this?

It should be stated in this writing that there were no transcripts of any of the proceedings, which is another clue that this all could have been trumped up to cover up the real story. The fact that there is no transcript is a huge deal! The three men sat in the dungeon cell of the county-jail. Earlier that morning, the judge had refused to allow Randall a new trial who asked for the new trial? Who defended Randall? Who defended Aaron and Anthony?, and had sentenced him to die by hanging in about a month's time. Two days earlier, the case against Aaron was dismissed with a *nolo prosee* decision, indicating the lack of evidence on which to try him. Anthony had received a jury trial that same day, and had been acquitted. The court had ordered their release, with their name cleared, but here they were. The state of affairs in Washington County in 1856 What else was going on in Washington County in 1856 that reflects a "state of affairs?" What makes the state of affairs different than it had been since the Fugitive Slave Law was passed (1850) the year before, or subsequently? dictated that no matter what was said by a court of law, that their fate would be determined by those arguing over at the courthouse.

Mob sentiment ruled the day on July 7, 1856. Randall was left in the jail for his verdict to run its lawful course, but Anthony and Aaron were removed this seems so banal, passive. Maybe seized? from the jail two days later – what happened in between? Why didn't the mob

immediately take them? How did they get into the county Jail dungeon cell?and immediately executed by hanging on a tree outside the Fayetteville city limits. The two men who tied the noose around their neck they should be named here, sons of James Monroe Boone, were respected lawyers, aided and abetted by their neighbors and kin. Their vigilante actions were committed in broad daylight, in full sight of public officials and the general public. How did the news get to the Black people if the deed wasn't done where they could see? Were the Black "witnesses" forced to see the lynching and then were made to take the gruesome message back to the plantation/farm?

The above narrative is based on court records¹ and an account of the events of the day published in the *Ft. Smith Herald* newspaper on July 12, 1856.

We learn from a gentleman recently returned from Fayetteville that a large number of the citizens of Washington county who resided in the neighborhood of Dr. Boone, who was murdered some time since by his negroes, headed by the Drs. Sons, [sic] came to Fayetteville on Monday last, took two of the negroes out of jail² and hung them. The negroes hung had been acquitted at a special term of the court held last week by Judge Batson for the purpose of trying them. One of the three, charged with the murder, was convicted and is now under sentence; the crowd did not molest him. We learn that the crowd before proceeding to the jail held a meeting at the court house and passed resolutions. While there they were addressed by Judge Batson, Mr. Wilson, and others who endeavored to dissuade them from their purpose but without effect.

We cannot approve of mob law and without passing any opinion upon this occurrence we regret to have to chronicle such an event.³

By today's standards is this only by today's standards? If it weren't standard then, why would an appeal even requested? Is this referring to a standard for enslaved and enslaver both? I might suggest that a different word than "standards" be used to describe this phenomenon, the refusal to grant a trial of appeal for Randall would be considered at best a miscarriage of justice. The mob hanging of ~~the~~ Aaron and Anthony was a lynching, in complete disregard of their release by the court. However, if I have to say this myself, the planning of the lynching happened in the courthouse and passed resolutions about their impending actions. Is there a transcript of this? How can we perpetuate this business of the courts trying to dissuade the mob when the mob holds a formal meeting with resolutions in the courthouse before they go to the jail, seize the innocents and lynch them?

¹ Washington County, Arkansas Circuit Court Record G 483 – 487 (July 2-7, 1856).

² If this account is accurate, the removal of Aaron and Anthony from the jail by the Boones and their neighbors was two days after the court ordered them to be released.

³ *Ft. Smith Herald*, July 12, 1856. This same report was reprinted in William Lloyd Garrison's Abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, XXVI:35, page 4, column 5, Friday, August 29, 1856. < <http://fair-use.org/the-liberator/1856/08/29/the-liberator-26-35.pdf>> Accessed June 24, 2018. The same news account was again referenced in *The Truth about Lynching I did not see this in the reference and the Negro in the South*, p. 27, by Winfield H. Collins, A.M., PH.D., Neale Publishing Co., 1918. <https://archive.org/details/truthaboutlynchi00colluoft>> Accessed June 24, 2018. This was pretty much about "abolitionist agitators" making life more difficult for the slave

These three enslaved men were accused of approaching Boone for money, then beating him senseless when he refused them, to be found later by Edmond and Thursday, his enslaved housekeepers. Where is the footnote for this? Assertions of fact and evidence were produced in the trial to support this scenario, primarily by thirteen of Boone's neighbors and friends. Am I mistaken that there is no available transcript of the trial, even for these assertions, and even for Edmond & Thursday's testimony? Despite the fact that none of them were present to witness the purported crime, their testimony was sufficient to convince a jury to deliver a guilty verdict for Randall for Boone's murder. This narrative could have a degree of plausibility, if you consider that the money the three men could have requested might have been money Boone had told them was theirs someday, but only to be used to buy from him their freedom. This is ludicrous, of course. Sharecroppers were killed en masse after the end of slavery because they gently asked to be paid for their work. How can this narrative be repeated with attribution of any plausibility? All considerations were offered by, not to, the enslaved person who was considered an item of property. Indeed, descendants of Boone have persistently repeated that a couple of years earlier, in 1854, Boone promised his enslaved laborers a share of the profit of the farm, as well as their freedom. Of course we know this is pretty amazing. Even when there were benevolent former slaveowners, African Americans had to come up with cash to buy property. There have been situations where the slaveowner provided a home for the enslaved/formerly enslaved mother of his children. Boone conceivably never intended to provide cash. He may well have been crediting to each one's account their share of the profit, but would only declare their freedom if and when their account reached the cost of his investment in them. Usually when there is crediting to an account there is some kept family record a notebook or something. Was that one of the items presented in court? If this is just another story then it may not be worth repeating with credibility as it perpetuates what is more than likely a falsehood. For a situation like this to be repeated with any confidence, there should be at least other examples locally of the practice. If Randall were providing labor for Boone, he could have decided he wanted his share now, particularly as his freedom was not Boone's to give. Anthony and Aaron could have been swayed by Randall to desire ready cash as well. Why are we making presumptions to build a story that already seems implausible. This just doesn't seem like we need to be creating excuses for the terrorists here. EJI is used to seeing this sort of thing in their work and we should be perpetuating that. That said, even in the turbulent days of May, 1856, again, what is turbulent compared to the rest? it is at the same time implausible that the three enslaved men would attempt what would amount to robbery, followed by a murderous attack on Boone.

A completely different narrative than the one that the white community used in court to convict Randall and to justify for themselves the lynching of Aaron and Anthony has been handed down orally within the African American community since 1856. This oral narrative was recorded in written notes made some years ago by the late Melba Smith, herself a descendant of an enslaved woman held by Boone. In Smith's words, "I have heard a totally different story that had been passed down by Mrs. Sword saying that one evening Dr. Boone was over at this Black woman's house misbehaving and that the black-Black woman had taken an axe and hit

him in the forehead.”⁴ ~~Smith chose to credit to a white woman the source of this narrative that had been and continues to this day to be held primarily within the African American community.~~ “As the African American narrative is not historically received as a legitimate one in this slave culture, Smith speaks to readers where they are comfortable. She references Mrs. Sword, who is white, to corroborate the African American oral history. This also says that the Black narrative, the counter narrative to the *Boone Event* was/is also known in the white community.” Sarah Wilson Sword and her husband John Sword, a white family, moved into Richland Township by 1880, very near the former home of James Monroe Boone, purchasing land once owned by Boone. Sarah Sword would possibly have learned the narrative from African American neighbors Edmond and Thursday Boone, the same two who were formerly enslaved by James Monroe Boone.⁵

This account of Boone’s mortal injury brings up a multitude of unanswered questions. Was Boone “misbehaving” in the home of a woman he held enslaved you mean could he have gone to a neighbor’s slave quarters? If so, after the injury, how did he return to his home? Homes I know I questioned cabin but I wasn’t looking for “home” to replace that word. I think from what I’ve seen on plantations, I’d call them “slave quarters” that Boone provided slave quarters for those he held enslaved were located along the Richland Creek, that ran along the edge of the property where his own home was located, so it is possible Boone did not have far to travel. Could Randall, Aaron, and Anthony have been involved in removing Boone from the woman’s home, delivering him to his own home? What part might his enslaved housekeepers, Edmond and Thursday, have played in these events? There is a lot to be learned about how Randall, Aaron and Anthony become implicated for killing Boone. I don’t think we need to propose possibilities. The best we should be able to do is do a thorough search and learning about the truth and not speculate. What do you think? In some reports by Boone descendants, Boone was sufficiently conscious at some point to name his supposed attackers. Was Boone himself the one who implicated Randall, Aaron, and Anthony? If so, why did he make the allegation against these three men, unless they played some role in the incident? Did Boone himself make the claim that the three attempted to take his money? Alternatively, were the sons of Boone aware that the injury occurred during a nocturnal visit with the woman, this characterization seems like there was a mutual relationship here – except the axe to the head thing... and the master and slave woman thing... and were they the ones who fabricated a cover-up? What testimony could Edmond and three other enslaved individuals who took part in the trial proceedings have possibly provided in the face of the terrifying and tragic counter reality presented in court?

Times were turbulent in the late spring and early summer of 1856. This is the second use of the word “turbulent” and another about “mob sentiment”The sovereignty issue for slaveholding

⁴ Sourced from *Arkansas Roots*, an unpublished document by Melba Smith (1945 – 2014) held by the Northwest Arkansas African American Heritage Association, curated by Sharon Killian, President. Smith and Killian cofounded ~~with the~~ NWAAHA. Used with permission.

⁵ Edmond and Thursday Boone appear in the US 1880 Census in Richland Township. Edmond Boone patented land adjacent to the Sword family in 1882: Washington County Archive Deed Book-Page 186 -158.

states and territories that had brewed for many years was stirring violence, particularly in nearby Kansas. Tensions were always high for the enslaved person(s) running high in the slaveholding communities of the South for both the enslavers and the enslaved. In this political climate, this should be said differently. Enslaved people and political climate during enslavement? Any politics in the slave holding states were to perpetuate enslavement in the South; that is not a “political climate” to Black people the sons of Boone led the way for the white mob who accompanied them to perpetrate their inhumane act of racial terror. this seems so dignified! The fact that one of these sons of Boone was elected weeks later to represent the county in the 1856 state legislature shows perhaps as much as anything the mindset of the majority of Washington County citizens on the lynching.

Who were Randall, Aaron, and Anthony? It is a challenge to determine their identity with certainty, as scant information was recorded about enslaved individuals in the legal record. For that matter, much of the business of enslavement you might say buying and selling people or deeds transferring or probate records or something like that since the business of slavery is so broad in Northwest Arkansas appears without question to have been conducted without benefit of legal record. Certain documents in the archive, however, provide clues to the identity and personal history of enslaved individuals, and in Randall’s case, provide details that can be validated. Randall is found in a Washington County personal record from 1841.⁶ At age 10, he was conveyed as property, along with four other enslaved individuals, by Thomas Smith to the children of his daughter, Sarah Jane (Smith) Williams, who had recently died. Because the Williams children were minors all under the age of 9, Randall’s enslaver was generally identified as David W. Williams, (is this general practice in the case of minors?) the husband of the late Sarah Jane (Smith) Williams, and father and legal guardian of their children. Additional documents⁷ show that Randall, along with the other four enslaved individuals and later, their offspring (were there more than four? The offspring of the enslaved individuals are also “slaves”, remained with the Williams family and in the same community in Richland Township, situated in the fertile valley of the White River it is described before, I think, as being along Richland Creek. Although there is no confirmed knowledge at this time of surviving descendants of Randall, it is very possible that he may have been the father of one or more of the children born to women from the original enslaved group conveyed to the children of Sarah Jane (Smith) Williams, whose names appear in the additional documents. The life Randall most likely led after age 10 was one of hard labor as a field hand. Randall was around 25 years old at the time of his execution he was executed on August 1, 1856.

The clues available that involve Aaron and Anthony are not nearly as easy to corroborate. It was assumed by the community that Boone was holding these two men enslaved which community? No records are available that show how or when Boone became their enslaver. Though Boone died intestate, one could presume that the sons of Boone, as his heirs to his property, including those he enslaved, considered it their prerogative to take the lives of kill Aaron and Anthony with impunity. The first document that involves an enslaved African

⁶ Washington County Archive, Will Record J-025

⁷ Washington County Archive, Land Record J-028; Washington County Archive, Land Record K-371

American named Aaron is in 1848, when James Byrnside conveyed as property through his will an individual named Anthony to his daughter, Margaret Jane Blakemore.⁸ A later document is found from a probate proceeding in 1852 that also involved an individual named Aaron.⁹ If the Aaron we are memorializing is the same individual as named and described in that probate proceeding, we learn that he was an abused and neglected African American young boy who had been subjected to hire year-to-year along with an enslaved adult named Jack, to provide income for the estate left to two minor children after the death of their father, Joseph Henderson, who had been Aaron's enslaver. The probate court allowed the guardian of the Henderson heirs, Robert Crawford, to convey Aaron as property at an auction. The name of the highest bidder at the auction was not recorded in the next court record,¹⁰ leaving open the possibility that the subsequent enslaver might have been James Monroe Boone. If this scenario is indeed part of Aaron's personal history, he would have been all too familiar with hard labor. Also, two thoughts emerge from this assumed background. First, he would have been enslaved by Boone for around four years by 1856. Second, he would have been a mere teenager on May 31st at the time of ~~Boone's death the attack on Boone~~ and the trial in early July. An additional clue that may substantiate this premise of Aaron's background is provided by the fact that an enslaved African American woman named Easter testified at the trial. Assuming that she could be the same Easter enslaved first by George Kincheloe and subsequently Joel Harrel as documented in 1845,¹¹ she would have lived in relatively close proximity to Aaron while he was enslaved by Henderson and his heirs, in an area on the other side of the county from Richland Township. It is notable that Easter is the only individual to testify who came from outside the Richland Township area, and otherwise would seemingly have no link to the proceedings.

Several records are found that involve an enslaved African American named Anthony. The earliest concerns a young man judged to be around 12 years old who is conveyed as property by David Walker to John Billingsley in 1841.¹² Another record, in 1848, is a probate record filed by attorney Jeremiah Odle who was seeking the custody of an enslaved individual named Anthony on behalf of Mahala (Williams) Bilbrey, one of the heirs of this Anthony's enslaver, John Williams.¹³ In 1849, a probate record shows that Elizabeth Buchanan, as heir to the previous enslaver, James Buchanan, became the ~~ownerenslaver~~ of an individual named Anthony.¹⁴ The Buchanan document shows that Anthony was a servant, presumably indicating domestic duties. It is not outside the realm of possibility that all three of these records could refer to the same individual, as none indicate how or when these various enslavements began. If so, Anthony lived an itinerant life, likely with very different circumstances in each situation. Also, if we use the age given in the Walker document, we could conclude that Anthony was around 25 years old at the time ~~of the attack of Boone's death~~ and the trial. Accordingly, he

⁸ Washington County Archive, Will Record AB-032

⁹ Washington County Archive, Probate Record B-327

¹⁰ Washington County Archive, Probate Record B-373

¹¹ Washington County Archive, Personal Record A-086

¹² Washington County Archive, Land Record D-610

¹³ Washington County Archive, Personal Record A-141; Washington County Archive, Probate Record, B-087

¹⁴ Washington County Archive, Accounts Current, Probate Record B-270

would have been enslaved by Boone for six or seven years, undoubtedly consigned to hard labor as a field hand.

Of the three records, the 1841 document may have the most relevance to the Anthony we are memorializing, as supported by additional clues. Willis Pettigrew, a formerly enslaved individual who died in 1913, was known to be a son of one of the men lynched in 1856.¹⁵ Though Willis' birthdate was generally unknown, he was presumed to be quite elderly at the time of his passing. According to a document from 1842, there is an enslaved infant named Willis, who, along with a group of other enslaved individuals, was entrusted to the care of David Walker by Lodowick Brodie.¹⁶ If this document refers to the same Willis, it would be Anthony, who had been held by the aforementioned David Walker, rather than Aaron, who would be the more likely candidate to be Willis' father. Willis was known to have a daughter, Elmyra Cook, who was born into enslavement in Texas,¹⁷ and moved back to Washington County in 1872 until her death in 1945. Ongoing investigation is underway to discover any additional descendants of Willis or of Elmyra.

This background summary was prepared by Community Remembrance Project team member Margaret Ann Holcomb, with collaboration with Sharon Killian, President of the Northwest Arkansas African American Heritage Association; advice from Jerry Hogan, fellow team member and historian; and the support of other Community Remembrance Project team members. Margaret is preparing for publication a study of the enslaved individuals, their enslavers, and other associated individuals involved in the trial of Randall, Aaron, and Anthony and the subsequent lynching. The study also addresses the legal, historical, political, and economic factors in the territory and state of Arkansas 1828 – 1856 that impacted these events.

¹⁵ *Fayetteville (Ark.) Democrat*, newspaper, Tuesday, July 3, 1928, page 12. According to his recorded interviews, Willis was enslaved by the Zebulon Pettigrew family, who he continued to serve as a free man. The Pettigrew family also lived in the same area as the families who, according to the above scenarios, may have enslaved Easter and Aaron.

¹⁶ Washington County Archive, Land Record D-446

¹⁷ Though details of Elmyra's circumstances are not currently known, it is familiar to this researcher that a number of families took refuge in Texas during the War Between the States, during which time Elmyra and her mother would still have been enslaved.