

the road there by your gin." Only then, Frey said, did he realize a lynching might have occurred on his property. Only then, he said, did he return home, walk into the grove, and spy the body. "Yonder it is," Frey said he exclaimed, and for all his account's bald-faced absurdities, yonder it indeed was.

Leo Frank, head snapped back, chin resting in the noose's bottom coil, dangled from above. Though half an hour had elapsed since the deed was done, his body was still warm, for unlike those wretches dropped through the gallows' trapdoor in a putatively humane hanging, Frank had not died instantly. Rather, he had slowly suffocated, struggling so ferociously he'd ripped open his neck wound. Blood oozed down his shirtfront. As the *Constitution* would grimly note: "He undoubtedly flayed the air."

By the time Frey wandered into his woods, all of Georgia and, for that matter, much of America, was awaiting word of Frank's fate. Not only had Atlantans awakened to front-page headlines (SPEEDING MOB SEIZES FRANK, boomed the *Georgian*); so, too, had the inhabitants of most every other city in the land. Intoned the *New York Times*: LEO M. FRANK KIDNAPPED AT NIGHT FROM GEORGIA STATE PRISON FARM BY ARMED MEN IN AN AUTOMOBILE. Nowhere, however, was interest more avid than in Marietta, where agitated locals had been congregating on the square since dawn. It was to this audience that an allegedly anonymous source—speaking by phone to Deputy Sheriff Hicks, who had himself made the trip to Milledgeville—broke the news: "Leo Frank's hanging to a limb down here near Frey's Gin. Retribution!" And so the spectacle began.

From Marietta, from neighboring farms and villages, and finally, from Atlanta, they came. Observed the *Atlanta Journal's* Rogers Winter:

They swarmed the road from both directions. They seemed to rise up out of the ground, so fast they came. The automobiles came careening, recklessly disregarding life and limb of occupants. Horse-drawn vehicles came at a gallop. Pedestrians came running.

The vehicles stopped in the road at the grove and soon packed the road and overflowed into the fields. As the vehicles would stop, their occupants would jump out and run to the grove, bending forward, panting, wild-eyed.

Women came. Children came. Even babes in arms.

By 8:30, over one thousand people had gathered, and scores more were arriving each minute.

Initially, at least, the gawkers conducted themselves with a degree of restraint. Noted the *Georgian's* O. B. Keeler:

In a terrible way it was like some religious rite. Watching the curiously reverent manner of those people, a manner of thankfulness and of grave

satisfaction, it was borne in with tremendous force what the feeling must be on those Cobb County men and women toward the man who they believed had slain Mary Phagan.

The journey to Frey's gin was a sort of dreadful pilgrimage.

"I couldn't bear to look at another human being, hanging like that," said one woman. "But this—this is different. It is all right. It is—the justice of God."

Among the men there was evident a grim and terrible satisfaction.

"They did a good job," was the comment, spoken in many tones, but with a curious inflection that was always the same. "A good job."

Yet however solemnly the crowd at first comported itself, however content most seemed merely to gaze upon Frank's body as if it were a gaffed tarpon, the prize catch, the prospect that things could get out of control quickly became apparent. As the numerous photographs taken that morning suggest, the gamut of emotions ranged from jubilation to rage to something approaching sexual rapture. In the background, boys tossed straw boaters. To the side, rambunctious sorts jostled for better vantage. Up close, a couple fervently embraced. And in front, a slack-jawed young man clung to Frank's distended blue hand. Commented Rogers Winter:

A horrible sight met the eyes of the people who were first to arrive at the grove, and a still more horrible sight met the eyes of the later arrivals, who found not only the body swaying but surging around it a closely packed mass of men whose excitement was something fearful.

That Frank's inanimate form inspired near hysteria was hardly surprising, for of all the tribal rituals by which the white South asserted itself, none released more primitive energies than a lynching. And of all the men who ever wound up at the end of a lynch mob's rope, few conjured as many explosive associations as this one. Murderer, sodomite, Jew, Yankee—these were fighting words to everyone gathered at Frey's Gin. Seventy-eight years later, Narvel Lassiter—who was 9 in 1915 and whose mesmerized visage peers out from just behind the tree in several of the lynching pictures—distinctly recalled making a connection between the blood seeping from Frank's neck wound and the Watson-spawned rumor that Creen had inflicted the wound in response to Frank's homosexual advances. "Granddad told me a lot about it," said Lassiter, "and he knew a lot." Others leaped to even uglier conclusions. As the cloth girdling Frank's waist was only loosely tied, his genitals were, from several angles, visible. In the eyes of beholders unaware that death by hanging causes the extremities to engorge with fluid, here was the livid root of the victim's degeneracy.

The longer Frank's body hung at Frey's Gin and the larger the throng—which would eventually approach 3,000—grew, the more likely it became that some final atrocity would be committed. Already, in fact, the bolder lads had cut off the dead man's shirtsleeves. Then they'd knifed away the rope that had bound his feet. Though the majority of people, contended one writer, opposed "Apache-like barbarities," they were unwilling to counter the "rough element." They would go where they were led.

Such was the atmosphere when Robert E. Lee Howell—the truculent, hard-drinking firebrand who'd been so conspicuously excluded from the lynch party—announced his arrival on the scene by discharging the contents of his pistol into the air. Bareheaded, coatless, his eyes blazing, Howell was, by all accounts, in a frenzy, and after pushing his way through the crowd, he threw up his hands, clenched his fists and shaking them at Frank's body began to chant: "Now we've got you! You won't murder any more little innocent girls! We've got you now!! We've got you now!!!"

Howell's effect on the assembled multitude was galvanic, and the multitude, in turn, galvanized Howell. "Every once in a while when he paused," reported Rogers Winter, "some man in the crowd would give a yell, and the crowd would join in the yell, and it would get higher and higher, and the sound of it would fill the little grove and echo back and forth. These demonstrations seemed to fan the fury of the man by the body. His gesticulations became more violent, his raving words came faster and faster from his mouth, pouring out of him like a torrent."

The moment had come, and Howell wasn't going to be denied a second time. Again addressing himself directly to Frank's body, he proclaimed: "They won't put any monument over you! They are not going to get you! They are not going to get a piece of you as big as a cigar!"

It was at this juncture that Judge Newt Morris returned to Frey's Gin.

"Hear me, men," Morris pleaded after clambering atop a tree stump. "Citizens of Cobb County, listen to me, will you?"

A hush fell over the grove.

"Whoever did this thing," he began.

"God bless him, whoever he was!" Howell interjected.

"Whoever did this thing," the judge again began, patting the wild man on the head as if he were a fractious child, "did a thorough job."

"They shore did," echoed the throng.

"Whoever did this thing," Morris repeated, "left nothing more for us to do. Little Mary Phagan is vindicated. Her foul murder is avenged. Now I ask you, I appeal to you, as citizens of Cobb County in the good name of our county, not to do more. I appeal to you to let the undertaker take it."

No sooner had the judge uttered these words than Howell exploded. "We are not going to let the undertaker have it!" he shrieked. "We are

going
the d
"M
the u
think
you f
to th
A
"T
"T
A
and c
and
W
who
laid
with
the
with
it or
judg
the p
befo
spill
L
rabi
birth
sake
as fr
less
spok
"
the
of L
unti
it m
"
und
reac
Mo
eno
pull

going to burn it! That's what we are going to do! Come on, boys! Let's burn the dirty thing!"

"Men," Morris forcefully rejoined, "don't do anything to this body. Let the undertaker have it. The man has a father and a mother and whatever we think of him, they're entitled to have the body of their son. Men, I appeal to you for the good name of our county. Let all who favor giving the body over to the undertaker say, 'Aye.' "

A chorus of "ayes" rang out.

"Now, let all who oppose it say, 'No.' "

"No!" Howell alone importuned.

After a show of hands ratified the verdict, Morris jumped to the ground and dashed to the rear of the crowd, calling for the undertaker, whose horse and wagon happened to be standing by.

What occurred next was hideous and confusing. Even as two Negroes who worked for the undertaker drove the wagon into the grove, someone laid a sharp blade to the lynch rope, and Frank's body tumbled to the earth with a thud. On impact, the throng rushed forward, Howell in the lead, until the dead man appeared to vanish. Eventually, the Negroes reached him with their wicker basket. "Bring the body on, men," shouted Morris. "Bring it on. Quick, for God's sake." But there was no room to maneuver, so the judge wedged his way into the pack, holding it at bay just long enough for the pair to get a grip. The Negroes, however, managed only a couple of steps before Howell reached out and struck at the basket, upending it and spilling Frank's remains once again onto the hard red clay.

Later, people would shake their heads as they tried to fathom Howell's rabidness. Just a mean cuss, they reckoned. Just low-down, no matter his high birth. And that was part of it. Yet in the end, Robert E. Lee Howell—name-sake of one great man, cousin of another—was driven as much from without as from within. Marietta boy, Tom Watson supporter, somehow more—not less—than his confreres, he was the quintessential native son. Georgia now spoke through Howell as he raised a boot high above Frank's corpse.

"Again and again," wrote the *Journal's* Rogers Winter, "as a man grinds the head of a snake under his heel, did the man drive his heel into the face of Leo M. Frank, grinding the black hair into the dirt and dead black leaves until the crowd, stricken silent and motionless, could hear the man's heel as it made a crunching sound."

"Stop him, for God's sake, stop him!" Morris cried. Yet as the judge understood, he alone possessed the necessary moral authority, and after reaching Howell's side, he expended all of it, begging him to halt. Whether Morris got through to the man no one knows, but he did distract him long enough for the Negroes to recapture the body, stagger to the wagon and pull away.

The rig barely made it to the National Cemetery that marks Marietta's eastern city limits before it was overtaken by several automobiles—among them John Wood's Model T, Judge Newt riding shotgun. With what looked like half the throng from Frey's Gin in pursuit on foot, the prospect of further mutilation seemed imminent, and at the first chance, Morris jumped out of the car, climbed up on the seat of the undertaker's wagon and seized the reins. At a wide spot in the road, Wood again pulled alongside, and in one deft move, the judge leaped to the ground, jerked the basket containing Frank's remains into his arms and placed it across the Model T's backseat. "Now, John," Morris roared after climbing back in beside him, "drive like hell to Atlanta." And with Rogers Winter—a heretofore unheralded city hall reporter whose scintillating account of the morning's events would be transmitted by the Associated Press to the four corners of the earth—perched on the running board, that's what he did. Wrote Winter:

Opening wide his throttle, Attorney Wood poured into his motor everything it would hold.

By his side, with drawn face and gleaming eyes, Judge Morris strained forward, peering through the dust, waving his arms and shouting for automobiles to make way.

Crosswise of the tonneau, the end of it projecting a foot or more on each side of the car, jostled and swayed the undertaker's long basket with the dead body inside.

Down the road toward Atlanta sped the car, and up the road toward Marietta sped automobiles loaded with men going like mad to see the body.

The car with the body gave the cars with the sightseers just enough room for the end of the basket to miss a collision, and the cars with the sightseers gave equally as little room for the car with the dead man.

Low over the road hung an endless roll of dust, and through this dust the three men in the death car would dimly see cars coming one after another, a procession of them, all speeding like racers; and the death car would swerve a little to the right to pass them, which made the basket jostle and sway and rattle, while the sightseers flashing past would wave their hands and shout hoarse shouts as they raced northward to Marietta to see the body hanging in the grove.

At Smyrna, a crossroads community south of Marietta, Wood stopped long enough for Winter to duck into a phone booth and call Atlanta's Greenberg & Bond Funeral Home, which agreed to dispatch a motor hearse, then the party resumed its journey down through the valleys of Cobb, across the broad Chattahoochee and into town. At the corner of Marietta and

Ashby on the capital's northwestern outskirts, the mortuary's machine was waiting. "In a mad haste," reported Winter, "the basket was shoved into the undertaker's funeral car," and out of the executioners' hands. It was almost noon.

And so Leo Frank was returned to Atlanta, but he would not rest in peace—not yet. Though the undertakers made every effort to conceal the body, word quickly leaked out, and within an hour, hundreds had found their way to the hiding place—the funeral home garage. Amidst threats to break down the doors, Police Captain L. S. Dobbs (who two years before as a lowly sergeant had not only been among the men who answered Newt Lee's call but had discovered the murder notes) ordered a squad of 40 mounted officers to escort the remains to the establishment's chapel, which was two blocks distant. Shortly thereafter, the public was admitted.

For five hours this swelteringly hot August afternoon, Leo Frank's battered corpse, the cheeks crushed from the impact of Howell's boot heel, lay on a makeshift bier in Greenburg & Bond's front hall. Though the sight proved too ghastly for a few (several elderly ladies collapsed), most reacted "without so much as a look of horror." Upon exiting the funeral home, people lingered on the streets, talking excitedly and, as quickly as labs could print them up, buying pictures taken at Frey's Gin before the body was cut down. All the while, newsreel cameramen from Pathé and Mutual ground away. By dusk, more than 15,000 men (among them Frank's initial nemesis, Detective John Black), women and children had borne witness to the lynching brethren's work.

Meantime in Marietta, a fresh crowd had formed on the town square. There, Fiddlin' John Carson—whose new ballad had attained enormous popularity since its debut two months before—was sawing away on his Stradivarius reproduction, his thin nasal voice carrying the doleful tune and warning lyrics out over the sea of work-weary faces and into the red clay hills beyond:

*Little Mary Phagan
She went to town one day;
She went to the pencil factory
To get her weekly pay.*

*She left her home at eleven,
She kissed her mother goodbye;
Not one time did that poor girl think
She was going off to die.*

*Leo Frank he met her
With a brutally heart and grin;
He says to little Mary,
"You'll never see home again."*

*I have an idea in my mind,
When Frank he comes to die,
And stands examination
In that courthouse in the sky.*

*He'll be so astonished
To what the angels say,
How he killed little Mary
Upon that holiday.*

*Judge Roan passed the sentence;
He passed it very well;
The Christian doers of heaven
Sent Leo Frank to hell.*

Carson played the ballad again and again until finally folks tired of it, and he broke into *That Old Time Religion*, which was good enough for them.