

The Murder of Johannes Ulrich "J. U." Baur

By Jackie Layne Partin

One goal I have for this year (2017) is to make an effort to fill in some of the lost news reporting for Grundy County and area. Basically we have some news articles beginning with the plans for the construction of the James K. Shook School, but not much more remains of any local publishing that may have happened before the *Tracy City News* in 1888/1889. In 1873, the age old disagreement of where the county seat was, Altamont or Tracy City, made news in Nashville by way of a special correspondent to the *Republican Banner*. In 1875, Charles Foster from Cincinnati and Nashville published a paper in Tracy City called *Manufacturers' and Miners' Reporter*. The *Mountain Eagle* came on the scene in August 1883 in Tracy City being published by Ed. S. Jones, but we have no copy of it. It was heralded as "having a good deal of original reading matter." On July 9, 1887, Rufus J. Clarke of Nashville began the publication of a weekly at Monteagle called the *Mountain Eagle* for the MSSA families and friends. News correspondents kept busy sending big city newspapers some of the local happenings that seemed expedient to share with readers as Elnar Oswald "E. O." Nathurst did in 1876 when he got excited about one hundred deer being killed during a March snow. All were killed within ten miles of Tracy City.

Has the reader ever wondered why the mention at one time of being from Grundy County conjured up negative thoughts and actions? Years ago, on the first night of a certain college class in which I was a student, the professor asked each of us to tell something about ourselves. My turn came around, and of course, I mentioned that my home was in Grundy County. Immediately, there were smiles and whisperings among some of the other students. I stopped and abruptly said, "If you are worried about your vehicles being stolen, you are too late. They are already gone!"

Car and four-wheeler theft, both of which I have been a victim, making moonshine and bootlegging it, drugs and destruction of homes and death of the young, these are negative news, but so that one will not think that today's residents are more criminally minded, let's look back into our local past maybe a hundred and fifty years to learn of a true event that happened here in Grundy County.

In 1873 the family of Christian and Anna (Brosi) Marugg arrived in Gruetli, Tennessee, the terminus of their long journey from Switzerland." Christian and Anna were maternal gg-grandparents of my husband Grady Ward Partin. The words of a daughter, Barbara Marugg stated, "A man with a wagon met them in Tracy and brought them to old man Bauer's place in Gruetli. It was a log house, one room of

which was the general store and a smaller room where they sold shoes." In just a few months, the Maruggs would hear of the brutal murder of Mr. Bauer.

On Monday, **November 30, 1874**, an effort to murder Johannes Ulrich Baur/Bauer in Gruetli, Grundy County, Tennessee was made. He did not die instantly but lived long enough to give a verbal will to three witnesses. After the shooting, he was taken to the home of W. Boesch and told the witnesses that if he died, he wanted to make this deposition of his property: after paying his debts he desired that Mrs. Vernea Holzhower was to have all of his property during her lifetime, and at her death, he desired the remainder to go to his sister, Elizabeth Backenstoss. He desired J. F. Hauser his friend to execute his will. The will was written down by Esq. A. S. Colyar on **December 5, 1874**, and signed by the witnesses, W. Boesch, Wm. W. Boesch and Agnes Bolinger. Mr. Baur's death came on **December 1, 1874**, the next day after he was shot.

His death was probably the first atrocious crime against a new Swiss colonist in our county. He wasn't just any man; he was a "*sub-agent*" for Mr. Peter Staub who was partially responsible for the immigrants coming to our county in **1869**. Baur was a Justice of the Peace. At the time of his tragic demise, he was the postmaster at Gruetli. Just a couple years earlier, **1872**, Mr. Baur had drawn an exceptionally accurate map of the sections of the colony land. He was a merchant in Gruetli. At his best, Mr. Baur was a multi-tasker; at his worst, he lay dead in a friend's home, and for what reason? What had he done to deserve such swift and vicious judgment? Did this mean that folks in Grundy County were sorry excuses of the human race?

There were no computers, telephones, or other media to spread the word of the murder, but the whole county heard quickly and were outraged about such a crime happening. Dear reader, you would be proud of the detective work done by those involved in the search for the murderers. The investigation, led by A. S. Colyar began immediately. Soon four names came to light as being suspicious, beyond doubt. One of those names was William H. "Hard/Hardie" Hampton, a lawyer at Altamont, a recent candidate for the Legislature, well-known in the county, but not for good behavior, not held in high esteem.

As early as **1858**, Hard Hampton at the age of sixteen robbed the mail and was given a prison term. **On Apr. 29, 1861**, eighteen-year-old W. H. Hampton enlisted at Altamont, TN in Co. A, 1st TN Inf. (Turney's) for 12 months to fight with the Confederates. This was Capt. Alexander Patton's Company, and it was he who enrolled Hampton in the regiment. Then the Confederate Congress passed the Conscription Act on **April 22, 1862**. **On Jan. 5, 1863**, Hampton had written a letter to Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States, from Chattanooga, TN, and among

other things, he said that he had been *“in prison charged with murder, and was confined in Hamilton Co. Jail.”* On **Mar. 07, 1863**, Hampton was still listed as a prisoner, and several months later, he still had not been tried. At this point, poor Hard Hampton was a deserter, or at best, absent at muster roll calls from the Confederacy, and a murderer in jail begging for a court-martial. Being a lawyer, Hampton knew that if the Confederacy court-martialed him, he could get freedom because the man he murdered was a Union sympathizer. His Rebel commander just helped him right out of jail, no trial. Sorry folks, but I find that utterly strange since months later he was back in his public life, not in jail and not in the military.

Then out of public life and back in uniform, W. H. Hampton was in the Union Army this time around, having removed himself from public life to fill a vacancy on **Nov. 10, 1864**, being enrolled at Nashville, TN, and being commissioned by the Military Governor Andrew Johnson. He enlisted in Co. M, 10th Reg't Tennessee Cav. as a 1st Lieutenant. Why am I telling you all this? What has Mr. Hampton's military record got to do with the crimes he committed?

Who did he kill while he was in the military that would give him the need to ask for a trial? Didn't soldiers kill almost every day? Isn't that part of war? I'll insert a letter here to help us understand how this man's mind worked. It was written on **Feb.28, 1874**, from McMinnville, Tenn. The letter head is:

“Department of the Interior, Pension Office, Washington, D. C.”

“Sir, I have the honor to state that I was informed that one William H. Hampton resident of Altamont Grundy County Tenn. who has a claim filed before the Claims Commission was a volunteer in the rebel army served over one year, was arrested for murdering an old man, and was released from prison by his rebel commander (as it was said he “had only killed an old union devil” from jail in Chattanooga Tenn.)

Respectfully,

John H. Wager, Special Agent

Another name on the letter was *Hon. I. H. Baker, Comm. Of Pensions, Washington D. C.”* Along the left side of that letter are penned the words, *“By many citizens of that county.”*

The murder of this old man was probably the one Hampton committed before Mr. J. U. Baur toward the end of the year.

On **July 3, 1872**, W. H. Hampton signed a document attesting to the supposed fact that he had never voluntarily served with the Confederate Army. I suppose he was dragged kicking and screaming to Capt. Alexander E. Patton of Pelham, Tennessee, and forced to sign up for a year in the Confederate Army. One year after the war began, Confederate Conscription began, and then "the fat was in the fire" for so many young and older men who felt one year was plenty of that terrible war. A mandatory two years were added on to their voluntary one-year service. Later, Hampton was denied by the Union Southern Claims a reimbursement of \$129.75 for a horse bridle and saddle because he had participated in the rebellion.

Altamont, March 30th 1872

*I, William H. Hampton, 1st Lieutenant of Company M, of the 10th Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers Cavalry, certify on honor that Captain Calvin L. Brixey was a Captain in the 1st Independent Cavalry, and his widow is, as I am informed, an applicant for an army Pension; that by communication with most any Loyal Citizen near Dechard and the Department can get other information, corroborating with __. And I further certify, that the said Calvin L. Brixey, was captured by the Rebel General Wheeler's command in Franklin County, Tennessee, **1864**, while raising volunteers to go West. James Canaster and Martin Phips, two of Brixey's enlisted men was with him and escaped. Martian Phips now lives in Grundy County, Tennessee, and James Canatser lives somewhere in Kentucky. The Rebels taken Captain Brixey tied upon a horse near Murfreesborough and there they hung him by the neck until he was dead and then left him hanging by the neck forbidding the Citizens taking him down. He was hung on or about the **3rd of September, 1864** and remained there until about the **4th of September, 1864**. I know that I'm not mistaken in the identity of Brixey. I was well acquainted with him.*

William H. Hampton

Late 1st Lieutenant Commanding Co M, 10 Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry

It has always floored me when so many researchers feel that what William H. Hampton wrote in his short "Brixey Obituary" was the gospel truth making him a trusting witness to the circumstances and death of Brixey when he was such a con-artist himself with no integrity whatsoever. One might wonder if his story had any truth at all. He did say that he knew Brixey well, but one could wonder if he knew how to tell the truth. Maybe Brixey lived for many more years, maybe not, just a thought.

Of course, William H. Hampton knew Calvin Brixey well. They were two of a kind, cut from the same piece of fabric. Brixey's Company D's behavior and Hard Hampton's behavior were synonymous. Hard Hampton owned land in Tracy City, the favorite stomping grounds of Brixey. Actually, in Brixey's short-lived military life, if we accept Hampton's obituary on him, much of his time was spent in Tracy City playing the part of commander as James P. Summers stated, "*Captain **Brixey's** Company had command of this place, Tracy City.*" Over and over Capt. **Brixey's** name pops up in the

Union Claims made by Union sympathizers in Grundy County, TN who had suffered drastic removal of crops and animals from their farms by the U. S. government.

Supposedly Brixey's company had been mustered out of service, but they still hung onto their leader as shown by the date of Brixey's death and some of his mustered-out men still being with him. Just one quote will help the reader understand why I write as I do; throughout the years up until the murder of Mr. Baur, Hard Hampton was accused of murdering a Johnson man, and he attempted to kill a man named Smith. He was "...charged with fraudulently appropriating the pension money of an old lady named Purdom." His problem seemed to be "money." He couldn't get enough of stealing other people's incomes or savings. The afore mentioned surname of Purdom now leads the reader to the next two names of suspicious characters in the Baur murder, being Webb and Burritt Purdom.

The Purdoms, brothers, were sons of Wilson and Lydia (Fults) Purdom. In 1860, the Hamptons and Purdoms lived next door to each other in Grundy County. Daniel Webster "Webb" Purdom and Burritt "Burt" Smith Purdom were younger than William Hard Hampton, but they were not strangers to breaking the law. One of the Purdoms "...was the traveling companion of a man who was found dead in the hotel at McMinnville – having, as Purdom said (being in the same room with him), committed suicide. The other young Purdom was at the time keeping out of the way of criminal process from Tracy City." At the time they helped plan the murder of Mr. Baur, Webb was twenty-one-years old; his brother Burritt was nineteen.

The 1870 Census record was actually gathered for the Altamont/Beersheba area by William H. Hampton showing his ability to read, write and keep books, so one wonders why he felt the need to travel down the road of crime. Going into all the homes allowed Hampton to find easy targets and also to select other men to help him when he wanted to pull off a robbery or some other crime.

The fourth suspect of the Baur murder was George Myers. George had just recently, prior to the murder, robbed the house of Colonel Banks at Beersheba Springs. Horse stealing – well he did that too in Davidson County. George lived in Altamont and was the son of George and Clementine (Stotts) Myers.

"Upon the investigation it turned out that these four desperadoes had been out on a camp-hunt for several days before the murder, and the facts fixed them in the neighborhood of the murdered man, who was postmaster and a merchant, and was known to be getting ready to go out to buy goods. Only two parties were seen by Mr. Baur when he was shot, but upon examination the tracks of four men were found.

It was found that two had watched while two went in the house, and all ran off through the field.

A rigid examination of all four of the parties, separately, developed the fact that they were together that night, but no two could agree about when and how long they slept, or what time they went to bed, or what they had collected for, (because the hunt had been broken up a day or two before).

But, on the other hand, two of them denied seeing the other two after night, while the last two denied that they all staid all night at the house of George Myers, and that they ate breakfast there and walked to Tracy City the morning after the murder, a distance of fourteen miles; but, in fact, they were seen at Tracy City about sun up, having the appearance of losing sleep.

After they were arrested, one was overheard to ask the other about something, which was answered by the other saying he lost it in the run. A search in the woods in the direction which they ran, and in the direction of Altamont, where Hampton lived, led to the discovery of one of the masks (the two who came into the house after the shooting having on black masks).

This mask was found to be of peculiar goods, made of one-half of a girl's or child's sack, with eye, nose and mouth-holes torn in it, with pieces of white cloth sowed on below the eyes. Upon examination by experts, these pieces were found to be of new and very fine goods, such as has never been brought to that county by any merchant. When this discovery was made, and which was not until Saturday night, arrangements were at once made for a search, and before day Sunday morning several men were on the road with a determination to find the goods, and by night they returned with the other half of the sack found at the house of Hampton, and the piece of new cloth from which the eye-pieces had been cut found at Geo. Myers'. This was doubtless a piece of fine goods which George Myers got when he robbed Col. Banks' house. The jury is still investigating the case, but the proof already is said to be overwhelming.

The prisoners are held under a strong guard, and the citizens are determined to have justice done." (Transcribed from the Republican Banner/Tennessean)

Since it would take several pages to tell the whole story of these four characters, I will shorten it some by using words from the record that will help the readers understand the enormous amount of data and confusion that the trial for these four desperadoes collected. Some words or phrases used throughout the legal aspect of the story follow: Federalists, Rebel, John C. Brown, Governor of Tennessee, coroner's jury, 200 spectators, 6 guards, turning State's evidence, Mountain Outlaws, inquisition, pistol or gunshot, possible fifty witnesses, masked men, investigation closed at Tracy City, placed in Stockade, recommitted to jail, true bill found, wild uproar in Tracy City court room, Judge Hickerson, \$5 fine against Clerk and Sheriff for not being present at hour of

opening trial, four accused remanded to later court term, 700 inhabitants of Tracy City, Hard Hampton, Geo. Myers and Burritt Purdom taken to Jasper for trial, Webb Purdom escaped from stockade, surrendered and back at Stockade, change of venue—these are just a small portion of rhetoric involved in the initial planning, problems and publications of this trial.

In March **1876**, the Purdom brothers were acquitted at Jasper, Marion County.

Aug. 1, **1876**, the news from Tracy City as related to A. S. Colyar in Nashville was *“The Jasper jail was opened last night and Hard Hampton turned out. Everything was done so quietly that the Jailer says he did not know until after his breakfast this morning that Hampton was gone. The good citizens feel terribly outraged. Try and get Gov. Porter to offer a reward for Hampton’s arrest at once.*

The Governor has offered \$200 for Hampton’s apprehension.

A gentleman here from the mountains says with reference to Hampton’s release: “Hampton was one of the murderers of J. M. (U.--jackie) Bauer, a Swiss, and was turned out of jail by his friends. Jail breaking seems to be the solution of all murder cases.

Bauer was murdered and robbed about two years ago at Gruetli, the Swiss settlement in Grundy county, where he had a store. The suspected parties were hunted down, tried and two of them acquitted. Hampton’s case has been postponed term after term of the courts, with the above result.” (The Tennessean)

On August 5, **1876**, Governor James D. Porter set a \$500 reward on the person of Hard Hampton who at that time was running free. The notice was placed in the *Nashville Banner, Knoxville Tribune, Chattanooga Times* and *Jasper Herald* three times. In March **1877**, George Myers was remanded to Tracy City jail to wait for the next term of the Supreme Court in January **1878**.

In all this confusion, I supposed that all four men were acquitted at different times of the murder of “poor Mr. Baur.” Mr. Baur was dead, and it appeared that no one did the killing. However, this was not the end of the story.

A transcription from the Nov. 2, **1878**, *Daily American* follows:

“W. H. Hampton of Grundy County, was tried before the United States Circuit Court yesterday morning on the charge of forging the name of James S. Tate, guardian of the orphan children of a deceased Federal soldier, through which process he secured \$200. The crime of which he was charged was committed in 1872, but owing to indictments found against him in the State courts for murder, he was not arrested until after he was acquitted of the alleged

murder of Baur, the leading citizen in the Swiss colony at Gruetli, about three years ago. Baur was called out of his house by four men, assassinated and robbed. Hampton was one of four arrested on the charge of the crime. He came here a few days ago, but ran away, forfeiting his bond. A Deputy Marshal pursued him, arrested him at Altamont and brought him to Nashville Thursday night. When arraigned before the court yesterday morning he defended himself. But the proof against him was conclusive and a verdict of "guilty" was rendered. When Judge Baxter pronounced a sentence of five years in the penitentiary, the whole manner of the man underwent a complete change. He dropped into his chair crestfallen and despondent. He was greatly agitated, and when he subsequently attempted to take from his shirt front three fine gold studs, with a view to sending them to his wife, his hands trembled to such an extent that he could not do so. A Deputy Marshal came to his relief and preformed that office for him. He manifested a good deal of emotion and went into the prison with a feeling of the deepest depression. But Hampton was not unused to the prison, for he had already experienced the terrors of isolation. When a boy he robbed the mail and in 1858 was sentenced to serve a term of imprisonment for the crime.

He was a practicing attorney in Grundy county, and was well-known in the Cumberland mountains, and especially for his misdeeds.

It was only a few days ago, though under indictment for forgery, that he asked to be admitted as an attorney in the United States Circuit Court. His application was, of course, promptly refused."

The prison doors opened and shut for Hard Hampton. In the **1880** Census of Davidson County, his occupations were listed as lawyer and prisoner. Passing over the rest of his life toward his death, the reader is privy to his obituary from the **Oct. 12, 1916**, *Mrs. Grundy* newspaper. It was placed on the center of the front page—a place usually afforded outstanding citizens—those whose names and lives were above reproach.

"Sudden Death of W. H. Hampton—Our community was shocked Tuesday evening when the sudden and unexpected death of Attorney W. H. Hampton was announced. Mr. Hampton had been down town mingling with his friends in apparently good health and spirits and had returned home somewhat fatigued. A short time later he was found dying in his chair. Mr. Hampton a practitioner at the Grundy County bar for many years and was known as one of the best land lawyers in the county.

He was born in 1842 near Altamont in this county. His first wife was Miss Nellie Freeman from whom he was separated shortly after they were married. He then married Miss Libbie Smith of Altamont. To them were born five boys and four girls. After the death of the

mother of these children, he married Miss Dutton, who nobly assisted him in raising his large family of children.

Besides the widow, the following children survive and mourn his loss. Messers Smartt Hampton, Charley Hampton, Wade Hampton, Jay Hampton, Mrs. Jas. Scott, Mrs. William F. Nunley and Mrs. Ida Henderson.

Hard Hampton is buried at Hobbs Hill Cemetery near Tracy City, Tennessee

What happened to the Purdom brothers? Daniel Webster “Webb” Purdom went into law enforcement. A newspaper clipping (transcribed from ancestry.com) shared by the *Chattanooga Times* on April 27, 1886 tells some interesting news about Webb. “A special to the Times from Manchester, Coffee county, Tenn., gives the details of a bloody tragedy, enacted there at midnight, in which United States Deputy Marshall Webb Purden, of Manchester, and a moonshiner Clark, were killed, and three other moonshiners fatally wounded. About ten days ago Purden, with Deputy Marshal Huges, went on a raid among the moonshiners of Grundy county, Tenn., and captured and destroyed several stills. Between 12 and 1 o’clock this morning fifteen moonshiners rode into Manchester, determined to have Purden’s life... (missing words—jackie) Purden met them (seven—jackie) as they entered with a revolver, and a terrible battle ensued. Two moonshiners fell to the floor mortally wounded, and the gang retreated, but they had succeeded in fatally wounding Purden. Disabled as he was he seized a double-barreled shotgun and fired into the retreating gang and two more fell mortally wounded. Purden then fell dead beside the body of one of his victims. The gang carried off three of their wounded companions. A large posse is now in pursuit.”

On **May 13, 1886**, the *Manchester Times* informed its readers that D. W. Purdom was rapidly recovering and would be able to get out in a few days; he had not died that terrible night. Mack Clark, one of the moonshiners who was shot by Purdom, was still in critical condition with little chance for survival. On **05 June 1886**, the *Manchester Times* continued the story with the rumor that Jesse Cornelison, another assailant, was hurt worst by Purdom’s shooting. On **April 01, 1889**, the *Times* reported that Purdom had compromised with the masked members of the gang who attacked him in April 1886. The five men who had stayed in the area were to pay him \$100 each just as the three who left the area had done. Mack Clark was one of those who left for an unknown place when he heard that there was an indictment against him in the U. S. Court at Nashville. Mack was acquitted in the Coffee County Circuit Court of the charge of assault with intent to kill Webb Purdom.

And another account keeping up with Webb Purdom is a short story in the *Daily American* on **20 July 1887**. It appears that Webb may have survived his ordeal in Manchester, TN. “TULLAHOMA, July 19,—It was currently reported on the streets last

evening that D. W. Purdom, the hero of the Manchester tragedy, had died near Bardstown, Ky., Sunday. The American correspondent this morning found Mr. John Fly, a brother-in-law of Webb Purdom, and asked him if the report was true. Mr. Fly replied that he was not dead, but that he would be greatly better off if he were dead. The reporter was amazed at Mr. Fly's reply, knowing that he and Purdom, while being closely connected by marriage ties, were also firm friends after his heroic repulse of the band of armed moonshiners from his bed-room in May, 1886.

"Why, Mr. Fly?" inquired the writer. "Poor Webb is blind and a raving maniac. His hair was singed off his head and both hands charred. He cannot recognize his wife when she is near him, and nothing can do him any good. It is a hopeless case, and his death is only a question of a few days."

As reported from here a few days ago, Webb Purdom was dangerously wounded by a dynamite explosion twelve miles from Bardstown, Ky., while engaged in preparing a blast. No particulars of a definite nature were learned as to the extent of his injuries until Mr. Fly was informed by Mrs. D. W. Purdom by private letter."

It is believed that even this did not kill Webb Purdom, but he lived possibly another 10 or so years.

And then what happened to Burrirt Smith Purdom? In 1882, he married Martha Guy Riddle in Giles County, TN. This was probably one of the smartest moves Burrirt could have done—get out of Grundy County, break ties with all his past and try to make a new life for himself. Since he was wrongfully acquitted for his part in Mr. Baur's murder, he knew moving on would be wise.

George Myers was married to Clementine (Stotts) Myers and had four children living near Altamont when he stole the horse near Hopkinsville, Kentucky, in **1872**. He was arrested in Nashville and placed in the work-house. The horse had been sold for seventy-five dollars by George, but was recovered. This was two years before his part in the plan to steal Mr. J. U. Baur's money. The Tracy City news sent to the *American* on **Sept. 20, 1876** stated that the "*Circuit Court commenced here last Monday, Judge Hickerson presiding, and who is pushing things through with his proverbial energy. The criminal docket is still engaging the time of the court, with no case of interest except that of George Myers for a robbery committed at Beersheba Springs some four years since, and for which he has been confined in jail for the last two years awaiting a trial.*" Clementine had to be distraught without a husband and father to help her at home, but like his "friend" Hard Hampton, George finally got his turn in the State Penitentiary in **1880**, but probably for the theft at the Banks house in Beersheba in **1872**. He was 38, had no occupation and was listed as married.

The whole picture of these four characters is so cluttered that it appears that not one of the four men served any prison time over the murder of Mr. Baur in **1874**. To answer the question, "Is crime worse today in Grundy County than it was in the 'old days'?"

Note: Material from the *Tennessean* and *Mrs. Grundy* newspapers, *Fold3* and early, alert correspondents from Tracy City, Manchester, plus other areas, were used by me to collect this data. Without their good work back in the 1800s and early 1900s, we would not have known about this part of our history during the "Good Old Days!"