



New Orleans Mirror print.

Mrs. Foster Brutally Murdered with a Spike Maul

The lovely patriotic cover shown in Figure 1 discloses an ugly story. This Beauregard patriotic is franked with the first Confederate general issue, a 5¢ green lithograph showing the portrait of President Jefferson Davis. It is tied to the cover by a New Orleans, Louisiana, circular date stamp and bears an imprint of the New Orleans Mirror imprint at left. It is addressed to “Mrs. William C. C. Foster, Montgomery, Alabama.”

Mrs. William C. C. Foster was born Julia F. Whitten about 1828 in Georgia. Julia married William Foster in Washington, Texas, on 25 October 1852. During the Civil War, Foster was attached to the 1st Alabama Cavalry. William and Julia returned to his home state of Alabama during the war years. He enlisted at Montgomery, Alabama, in November 1861 as a Sergeant Major and mustered out as 2nd Lieutenant. He was captured at Cumberland Mountain, Tennessee, 3 October 1863, and transferred to Fort Delaware, 19 March 1864.

After the war, the Foster family returned to Memphis and that is where they are found in the 1870 Census, shown in Figure 2. William was listed as a cotton merchant, age 40, born in Alabama. Julia is listed as 37 years old. Also in the household, there was a 13 year old named Kate, born in Texas, and an Alice Foster, born in Mississippi.

From newspaper obituaries, it appears that both Kate and Alice were actually Whittens, relatives of Julia's. There were also two

servants listed, Clara Shure and Nancy Williams. Newspaper articles show that William C.C. Foster was a Mason, a member of the Desoto Lodge no. 299 in Memphis and a stockholder in the Merchant's Insurance Company. Advertisements also show that he co-owned a cotton factor business with M.J. Rossel. Foster died at the age of 47 from chronic diarrhea on July 15, 1876.

Tragically, Julia was brutally murdered in January 1879 at age 40, dying from a blow to the head with a spike maul, her skull crushed. The sensational story is told by Mary Moran in the blog “Dead Memphis Talking” at <http://deadmemphistalking.blogspot.com/> Moran's sources were local court house reports from newspapers such as the Memphis Daily Appeal, the Public Ledger, and the Knoxville Daily Chronicle, The Louisville Courier-Journal, the Wichita Eagle and numerous other papers of the day.

It didn't take long for the authorities to point the finger at Mrs. Foster's African-American servant, Maria Alexander/Wood, her purported lover Charlie Woods, and one other man named William Parker/Duncan. The lurid accounts of the day detail in vivid tabloid fashion the crime and subsequent attempts to bring Alexander, Woods and Parker to justice. Charles Woods and William Parker/Duncan were tried, found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. However, the cases were referred to the Supreme Court and sent back for retrial.

Originally posted in the Public Ledger, 8 January 1880:



The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

ADMINISTRATOR'S SALE
 OF
FURNITURE, ETC., AT AUCTION,
 BY A. E. FRANKLAND, 195 MAIN ST.,
Friday Morning, April 4, at 10 o'clock.
 The effects of W. C. C. FOSTER, deceased,
 consisting of
 ONE KNABE PIANO,
 PARLOR, BEDROOM and KITCHEN FURNITURE
 COOKING-STOVE, ETC.
 A. HATCHETT, Adm'r. A. E. FRANKLAND, Auc'r.
 Smith & Coiller, Attorneys.

Figure 3. Estate administrator's advertisement in the Daily Appeal for the effects of William C. C. Foster.



Age	Sex	Color	Occupation	Value	Property	Notes
40	Male	White	Farmer	5000	Land	Wife
37	Female	White	Wife			Wife
15	Male	White	Child			Child
12	Female	White	Child			Child
10	Female	White	Child			Child
8	Female	White	Child			Child
6	Female	White	Child			Child
4	Female	White	Child			Child
2	Female	White	Child			Child

Figure 2. 1870 Census showing the household of William C. C. Foster.

Figure 1. Beauregard patriotic addressed to Mrs. William C. C. Foster, who was bludgeoned to death in 1879.

Guilty of Murder.

The jury in the case of Charles Woods, colored, charged with killing Mrs. W.C.C. Foster, near the fairgrounds three miles east of the city, on the 29th of January last, this forenoon returned a verdict of guilty. This, for the second time, consigns Woods to the gallows. He was convicted at a former trial and the case went to the Supreme Court from which it was, remanded on a technicality for a new trial. It is stated that the woman servant of Mrs. Foster, and with whom Woods cohabited, wrote a letter to the Judges of the Supreme Court stating that she had testified against Woods under fear, and that her testimony on that occasion was untrue. The murder was one of the most diabolical, and merciless on record, and a more atrocious (sic) crime was never perpetrated even by savages.

Twice Woods was convicted and sentenced to be hanged but escaped the gallows with his life both times. In the end, there were no eyewitnesses to the crime and the testimony of Maria Alexander was so unreliable that there wasn't enough evidence to convict the men. It's unknown what became of William Parker / Duncan.

In the fall of 1889, a man named Robert Biggs was allegedly lynched in Hernando, Mississippi, for raping Mrs. J. N. King, a white woman. Robert Biggs, according to newspaper reports, was actually Charles Wood. After the death of Julia Foster, Charles Wood was, not surprisingly, ostracized by friends and family. As a consequence, he changed his name to Robert Biggs and moved to Mississippi.

The reports about his demise differ. One says he was shot and killed while fleeing. Other reports say he was arrested in Memphis and returned to Hernando where a mob took him from his jail cell and hanged him. Either way, this dangerous man eventually met the end that most would say he justly deserved.

Information about the Confederate Stamp Alliance (CSA) or a membership application may be obtained from the author at trishkauf@comcast.net or 10194 N. Old State Road, Lincoln DE 19960. The CSA is devoted to the study and dissemination of information about the stamps and postal history of the Confederate States. ☒

