MURDER WILL OUT

The horrifying true story of murder on Black Oak Ridge
(present day Oak Ridge, Tennessee)

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As I prepared to write a blog entry about the 70th birthday of the Oak Ridge Outdoor Swimming Pool and the vast history of the area surrounding it in East Tennessee, I came upon a murder story. I stumbled across the tale at the Center for Oak Ridge Oral History while reading transcripts of interviews of people who participated in the Manhattan Project. Two of those interviewed shared the story about the murder, which happened in 1921 in the pre-Oak Ridge area known then as Robertsville, Tenn. Although some of their details seemed sketchy, a couple things became clear: 1) A gruesome murder occurred in the nearby woods. 2) The murder, subsequent trial and state execution made headlines as a sensational event in the day.

After some research, I discovered the original plan was to rob the Oakdale Bank and Trust. The bank robbery – foiled in somewhat of a comical way – had a Wild West feel to it. A posse of 300 to 500 men scoured the mountains around Harriman with bloodhounds from Knoxville, trying to locate the four men involved. After the posse and sheriff arrested the defendants in Oakdale, they transported them to the Knoxville jail, which offered a more secure location. Many newspapers across the country picked up the story, but only local papers in Knoxville and Clinton supplied details. The Evening Independent, a St. Petersburg, Florida paper, supplied the most sensational headlines after the execution, writing things like, “Four Slayers Electrocuted,” “Sit in death chair for foul murder committed in Tennessee,” “Plotted to rob bank,” “Cut throats of two men-one of them lived and his story doom of outlaws.”

Local media also had a field day. The Knoxville paper quoted the defendants several times; each of them, of course, pointed the finger at the other as the guilty party. During jury selection, four jurors admitted to having formed an opinion as to guilt based on the victim’s account and the defendants’ statements published in the Knoxville paper. However, after closer questioning and obtaining sworn statements of their impartiality and commitment to supplying a “fair and impartial” judgment, the defense approved and seated all four on the jury.

The trial began July 18, 1921, and drew many spectators, including mostly “younger women and boys,” according to news reports. Tickets sold out daily for the train commute from Knoxville to the Clinton Courthouse. The oppressive July heat caused at least one woman to faint during the proceedings. On July 27, the jury convicted the four men of murder, and the judge sentenced them to death by electrocution. The executions, after an appeal failed, occurred on March 1, 1922. Many consider this case to be the worst crime ever to have been committed in East Tennessee; and the state’s execution of four men in one day still holds the dark state record.

After the capture of one of the men, Roane County Sheriff Walter W. Roberts questioned why he and the others decided to kill. The man’s reply was simple: “Dead men tell no tale.”

However, live men do.

This story is based on Andrew Crumley’s testimony to the court and interviews with the press about his horrifying ordeal in the dark woods of Black Oak Ridge, just above Robertsville.

Mark W. Griffith
Murder Will Out
The true, horrifying story of murder on Black Oak Ridge near Robertsville, Tennessee
(Present-day Oak Ridge, Tennessee)

“Lo, how Thou dost turn murder out always!
Murder will out, we see it every day.”
Chaucer

Introduction
On May 30, 1921, a gruesome murder occurred in the woods close to Robertsville, Tennessee. After the ensuing trial, guilty verdict, and customary appeal, the 34th governor of Tennessee, Alf Taylor, refused to commute the death sentence of all guilty parties, saying in a statement: “To shoot a man down is horrible, to cut his throat in cold blood is horrible, to tie men’s hands behind them and then gag them and then cut their throats is unspeakable horrible. This is the crime for which four men stand convicted. Lewis begging for his life, died floundering in his own blood, Crumley survived to tell the awful story. Murder will out!”

Anderson News, March 1, 1922

Chapter 1
The Hire

Andrew Crumley worked for Arthur Webster taxi service in Knoxville, Tennessee. In the late afternoon of May 30, 1921, around 6:10 p.m., he was standing with his cab at the taxi stand located on Depot Street in front of the Southern Railway Station. Two well dressed men in their twenties approached him to negotiate a taxi ride to Clinton.

Unknown to Crumley, the selection of his taxi cab was not random. The two men were specifically looking for a big, powerful car to employ. The Chandler Six, with its large seven-passenger seating capacity, powerful, fast engine, and advertised benefits of handling “steep grades in mud or sand,” made it the perfect getaway vehicle.

Crumley and the two men agreed on the fare, $3 per hour for city roads, and $3.50 per hour for country roads. As soon as the taxi pulled out, the men told their driver they wanted to stop in Clinton first, and then continue 6.5 or 7 miles further, offering no specific location. Crumley, suspicious that the men wanted to pick up illegal whiskey, informed his passengers he did not want to have any part of that kind of activity. The two men assured him that their trip had nothing to do with bootleg liquor. Crumley agreed to continue, but informed them that because of the slight change in plans, he was going to swing by the boarding house where he lived to pick up a friend. Crumley explained he wanted company on the late drive back to Knoxville. The roads during that time were difficult to navigate; only a few were paved, and none of them had streets lights. Once they arrived at the boarding house at the corner of Cumberland Avenue and State Street, Crumley asked his friend if he would like to join him with his fare.
to Clinton. His friend agreed, but then fellow resident George Lewis, overhearing the conversation, asked if he could go in place of Crumley’s friend. Lewis explained he had a daughter that lived in Clinton, and this would give him a chance to visit her. Crumley replied he was only interested in companionship on the difficult drive back, so it didn’t matter to him who accompanied him. After the arrangements were settled, Lewis joined Charles Petree and John McClure in the taxi, and they all made the 20-mile journey to Clinton. Once there, the two men gave Crumley directions to a boarding house called Watt Hotel.

**LOCATION:**

*This hotel was possibly located on Market Street in the center of Clinton, near the existing train depot. “There were other boarding houses in the area during that time frame, such as Brown House and Whitson House.” (Stephanie Hill, Anderson County Historical Society)*

Crumley pulled up in front of the hotel, and McClure got out of the taxi, saying he would be back in just a moment. Petree remained in the car. The owners of the hotel, O.H. and Edna Hensley, were sitting on the front porch with two other young men, Otto Stephens and Tom Christmas. When McClure stepped onto the porch, he asked Stephens and Christmas if he could have a word with them. The three men entered the hotel and went to the room where all four had been staying for the past three days. As the men entered, the owners of the hotel overheard McClure whisper something about the speed of the car.

The men collected all four of their belongings and headed back to the taxi. As they walked onto the porch, they said their goodbyes to the owners. Earlier in the day, Christmas had settled the room bill. The men loaded the luggage and got into the taxi. They told Crumley they wanted to drive into the country. Again, Crumley raised the subject of illegal whiskey. The men assured him once more they had no whiskey in their bags and that they just wanted to go into the country. Crumley, being suspicious of the undisclosed destination, asked them if they had any burglar tools in any of the bags. The men again assured him there were no items in their bags of that nature. Somewhat satisfied with their answers, Crumley pulled away from the hotel around 8:20 p.m. and was given turn-by-turn instructions until he found himself on the Clinton/Oliver Springs Turnpike heading west.

**LOCATION:**

*The Clinton/Oliver Springs Turnpike was also known as Old State Highway 61. The taxi was heading from Clinton toward Robertsville, present-day Oak Ridge. This is the same route that eventually turns into present-day Oak Ridge Turnpike around the Elza Gate area. Old State Highway 61 was re-routed (by turning right at Elza Gate) around the original pre-Oak Ridge/Robertsville area for the Manhattan Project through Marlow and simply renamed Highway 61. Obviously, it’s not proper to have a state highway running through a secret government city.*

*Aerial Map made possible by Donald Raby*

(Crossroad location is present-day Raleigh Rd. and Robertsville Rd, Oak Ridge)
As the trip continued, there was talk and laughter. The four men seemed to be enjoying themselves in the back of the taxi, and Crumley and Lewis were having fun up front. Crumley still wasn’t exactly sure where the men wanted to go, but the relaxed environment in the car alleviated any further suspicions or concerns until he overheard one of the men mention he wanted some whiskey. At that moment, Crumley surmised he had possibly been deceived and the men were actually taking them into the country to locate their moonshine still or possibly someone else’s.

About 10 to 12 miles from Clinton, on the Clinton/Oliver Springs Turnpike a short distance above Robertsville (Roberts Crossroads), one of the men yelled from behind, “Stop the car! I think this is the place.” Petree got out of the car, looked around, apparently didn’t recognize the location and hollered, “No.” Petree then stepped onto the running board of the Chandler and told Crumley to continue a little further. At this point, Crumley was certain they were looking for a moonshine still. After a short driving distance, Crumley was told to stop again. Petree went to the front of the car to look around and then asked Crumley if he saw a trail going off from the road. Crumley replied he did not, but that he did see a “place in the bank.” Petree was discussing the location with another one of the men who had gotten out of the car when Crumley heard from the back seat, “Hands up!”
LOCATION:

This would have been north of Roberts Crossroads, the center of Robertsville. Roberts Crossroads would have been the intersection of present-day Raleigh Road (Old State Highway 61, originally) and Robertsville Road (East Fork Valley Road, originally). Present-day Kim Son Restaurant marks the spot (the original Lockett store building, circa 1939). Crumley testified that he drove 10 miles on Clinton/Oliver Springs Turnpike and stopped one mile from Robertsville. Anderson News reported the mileage as being 11 or 12 miles from Clinton. The taxi was stopped on Old State Highway 61-Clinton/Oliver Springs Turnpike behind the present-day apartment buildings on Highway 62/North Illinois Avenue close to the corner of Iroquois Road. Old State Highway 61 actually ran behind the apartment complex, originally. During the Manhattan Project, the road was straightened to avoid the extremely winding road.

(The red path indicates the original winding road of Old State highway 61.)
The Double Cross

Hearing the “hands up” command, Crumley and Lewis immediately complied without looking to see who was issuing the order. Surprisingly, Crumley made the assumption that a local sheriff was making an arrest due to the illegal nature of their stop, the location of a moonshine still. Crumley began to plead his case to the imagined sheriff: “I ain’t done nothing. I got a taxi badge here showing I’m a taxi driver from Knoxville.” He also added that his friend was innocent too, explaining Lewis was only along for the ride.

Crumley’s reaction to the command speaks to his state of mind at that time; he had convinced himself that the four men were looking for, or operating, a moonshine still in that area. In 1921, Prohibition was into its first full year, and law enforcement agencies were actively seeking illegal alcohol sales, including the manufacturing of liquor. The punishment for breaking the Prohibition Law was steep: a $5,000 fine and one year in prison. In today’s dollars, this would be a fine of more than $60,000. Crumley’s taxi fees were only $3 per hour for city roads and $3.50 per hour for country roads. He would have only received a fraction of that fee as wages, so it’s obvious a fine of that magnitude would have been financially devastating.

Crumley’s pleas were met with silence. There was certainly a moment of confusion in the minds of the remaining men in the back of the taxi, especially the one holding the gun. Crumley, realizing no one was responding, mustered the courage to look over his shoulder to see who had issued the command. (McClure admitted to the press, after capture, that he was in the back seat holding the gun and issuing the orders.) As Crumley turned, he heard the voice again say, “Hold up your hands,” while simultaneously seeing a large pistol pointed at him. At that moment, Crumley realized there was no sheriff, and his hands went higher into the air. (McClure also stated that two other men had pistols.)

Crumley and Lewis were ordered out of the car, and their hands were tied behind their backs. The four men began searching through Crumley’s pockets. They found his Army discharge papers, taxi badge, two or three dollars, several letters and a New Testament Bible. Nervously, Crumley began to talk to the four men: “If you want this car, men – I don’t know what this is all about, anyway – but if it’s the car you want, take it. You can drive it right off, and I won’t object. Spare my life. I have a wife and baby at home.” One of the men, responded in a condescending, snide way, said, “You will see your wife and babies all right.” Crumley continued his nervous rambling when the one with the gun responded, “Shut up or I’ll blow your damn head off. Haven’t you ever had a gun stuck in your face before?” Crumley complied. In perhaps an oversight, Lewis’ pockets were not checked. After they had finished going through Crumley’s things, Petree used a flashlight to lead them up a hill toward a very dark, secluded, wooded area on top of the ridge called Black Oak Ridge.

Location:

The six men were walking toward a chert pit.

(The store building in the following photo of the chert pit was not there at the time of the murder.)

Photo made possible by Donald Raby
This is the Chert Pit (Murder Site) in the early 40’s (now covered in Kudzu). The building was a tavern built in the late 20’s or early 30’s.

Photo permission by Donald Raby (www.kingstondemolitionrange.com)

**Same photo today**

“I’m actually standing on Old State Highway 61. It’s also not smart to stand or walk in Kudzu-snakes!”  

MWG

Several yards behind me is the Chert Pit area.
Chapter 3

The Murder

The men were being led to a rather large chert pit area that was used to gravel roads around Robertsville. Kids would play in this area and refer to it as the sand pit. (A local resident testified that Petree used to visit an aunt and uncle only a quarter of a mile from this pit when he was a child.) The pit was approximately 50 to 60 feet in diameter, somewhat deep, and had a sinkhole appearance to it that some described as looking like a crater. Crumley and Lewis were led into the base of the pit.

Even at this point, Crumley never felt his life was really in jeopardy. The four men had assured them both that they were not going to be harmed, and Crumley was reassured he would see his wife and kids again. But this changed as Petree was rifling through Lewis’ pockets. He came across a copy of Lewis’ Police Gazette and condescendingly joked, “He is a sport.” The Police Gazette was well known for its scantily clad women on the front cover and tabloid-like true crime content. Illuminating Lewis’ face with the flashlight to observe his response, Petree paused to stare for a moment, then lost all signs of amusement and remarked, “I do believe I know you.” Lewis’ honest, unfortunate reply sealed his fate: “Yes, I believe I know you, too.”

The other men must have overheard this exchange. (In a possible attempt to separate himself from the murder and gain public sympathy, McClure’s statement to the press after capture stressed that harming the men was never a part of the plan, suggesting that something must have occurred that changed the minds of the others.) They continued to tie up both men with trout line. Crumley’s hands were throbbing from the tightness, and the trout line began cutting into his flesh. Lewis was gagged first with a section of towel held in place by trout line wrapped several times around his head. Crumley’s gag was only a towel tied at the ends at the back of his head.

During the securing of the gags, the mood of the men changed. They began to sadistically taunt Crumley and Lewis with threats like, “How do you feel now?” and, “If you move, we’ll blow your brains out.” After they had finished tying up the pair, Petree took Crumley’s hat off his head and said, “Let ‘em have it!” At that point, one of the men holding a gun hit Crumley in the back of the head with a massive blow. Crumley said he heard a “swishing sound,” felt the impact and saw a bright flash in front of him followed by excruciating pain. He fell to the ground, possibly blacked out for a moment.

Lewis was next. He received two or three horrifically hard blows to his head, crushing part of his skull. (McClure stated to the press he saw the savage blows being inflicted on Lewis and yelled, “That’s enough of that!”) Crumley slowly opened his eyes and felt as if everything that was occurring was distant and faint, but decided in order to survive, he would feign death. He heard one of the men ask, “Have you cut him yet?” The reply was, “No, I’m going to now.”
The next moment must have been horrific. Crumley heard a gurgling noise that sounded like blood running and a squishing sound that he realized was a dull knife ripping through flesh. (A small pen knife was found on Lewis’ torso by the medical examiner.) Crumley looked over at Lewis in time to see one of the men cutting Lewis’ throat. Stunned, Crumley felt a foot step on his hand and heard someone say to the others, “He’s dead.” Then, he heard the terrifying reply: “Cut his damn throat anyhow.” He felt someone hold his head as he lay on his back. A flashlight was being shined in Crumley’s face as he felt his throat being sliced opened with a metal blade. He then heard one of the men say, “Wipe off your hands.” As the men started to leave the pit, Lewis had a spasm and kicked Crumley in the leg unknowingly. One of the men heard Lewis’ movement and yelled out, “...that son of a bitch ain’t dead!” Then Crumley, sensing movement around him, heard another ghastly ripping of flesh and the cold-blooded response: “That will fix him.”

Chapter 4
The Escape

Crumley heard the men walking out of the pit. The leaves and twigs were snapping under their feet, and the sound faded as they headed in the direction of the car. Knowing it was time to make their escape, Crumley looked over to Lewis, who was groaning and writhing in his blood. Crumley desperately tried to get to his feet, but the blow to his head and loss of blood made him dizzy, and he crashed face-first into the sandy gravel. His second attempt to stand was successful. Rising up on one knee and steadying himself, he stood straight up. He walked toward his friend, who was only an arm’s length away. He immediately noticed Lewis’ head was positioned in a disturbingly, awkward way. The cut from the double slash was horrific; it must have severed most of the tendons and muscles. As Lewis writhed in agony, his head was hinging open at the neck, increasing the savage effect of the double cut. Crumley, feeling compelled to straighten out Lewis’ head, eased back down on both knees behind him. He tried to speak through his gag to let Lewis know he was there. He then used his knee to adjust Lewis’ head back to a more normal position. As he desperately tried to straighten Lewis’ head, Crumley described what he heard next as the unmistakable sound of “the death rattle.” Lewis’ body became motionless. For a moment, Crumley watched his friend lying still in a pond of blood. He was dead. Terrified, Crumley quickly got to his feet, took one step and fell. Now desperate, he struggled back to his feet and hurriedly climbed out of the pit. His mind began to suspect the four men would be returning to make sure both he and Lewis were dead. With a gag in his mouth and his hands tied behind his back, he ran through the dark woods, away from the direction he thought the car would be. After only a few strides, he ran into a barbed wire fence. Flipping over the fence, he felt pain ripping through his body. He picked himself up and walked a short distance until he spotted a farmhouse.

In the yard of the farmhouse, Crumley was able to use a tree trunk to rub the gag down from his mouth to his chin. He then made his way onto the porch and began kicking and yelling for help. The commotion must have frightened the family inside, and the suspicious person on the other side of the door asked what he wanted. Crumley relayed, in detail, his tale of terror. The owner, thinking it was some sort of ruse, refused to open the door. Crumley was forced to continue searching for help.

Not far from the farmhouse, he came to a road. The road could have been an old wagon trail or possibly present-day Iroquois Road.
Whichever road it was, he was most likely walking in a southern direction toward Robertsville. As he was preparing to cross the road, Crumley heard what he knew to be the engine of his Chandler Six roaring nearby. He was convinced the men discovered that he had made his escape and were searching for him. In reality, the four men were most likely now traveling north toward Oliver Springs. In the dark, quiet woods, the big, six-cylinder roar of the Chandler engine probably echoed around like thunder through the Black Oak Ridge area.

Terror-stricken, Crumley ran away from the road, back into the woods. Retracing his steps, he hit the same barbed wire fence. He didn’t flip over the fence this time; but in total agony, collapsed at its base and remained there for a time. During his rest, by some miracle, the gag slid down from his chin into the bleeding wound of his neck, stopping the flow of blood. Relieved to hear the car fading into the distance, Crumley got to his feet and continued on a course he thought was taking him deeper into the woods. However, he was heading back to the same wagon trail. He continued across the road, and after a short distance, found himself in an old, open field amidst a farm area.

**Location:**

*Crumley was heading from present day Iroquois Road and N. Illinois Ave vicinity in a southern direction toward Robertsville.*

Hanging close to the forest line, he followed the open field, searching for another farmhouse, and recognized he had made it back to the turnpike. At one point, Crumley saw a light that spooked him into thinking it was the men searching for him. Resorting back to panic, he ran into the woods for cover. Satisfied he was mistaken, he stepped back into the field and, looking south toward Robertsville, saw a building in the distance that looked like a farmhouse. Crumley decided to press on toward the building, clandestinely using the forest as cover. As he got closer to the building, he realized it wasn’t a farmhouse, but a school building. Exhausted, hurting, bleeding and scared, he sat on the front stoop.

**Location:**

*The school house was Robertsville High School, presently Robertsville Middle School. The high school was built around 1918 and a surviving part of the building still exists today.*

Still paranoid that the four men were looking for him, Crumley felt exposed sitting on the porch. He knew he had to continue searching for help. He headed off in an easterly direction, following the Old State Highway 61-Clinton/Oliver Springs Turnpike, but kept the road well to his left. Soon, he came to a crossroad with a church on the corner.

**Location:**

*Crumley left the Robertsville High School porch and was heading west. He continued to follow East Fork Valley Road (present day Robertsville Road). He came to the old Robertsville Baptist Church. Today, the church is Faith Bible Fellowship at 145 Iroquois Road.*

Crumley, in desperate search for help, took a northerly turn and headed to the other side of Old State Highway 61. He began to turn west, still following the turnpike, and eventually made it to the home of John W. Key around midnight.

**Location:**

*Crumley walked through woods following East Fork Valley Road, heading east, toward the center of Robertsville. Roberts Crossroads was located at the present day corner of Raleigh Road (Old State Highway 61) and Robertsville Road (East Fork Valley Road). Crumley finally found help at Key’s home. The community referred to John Key as Uncle Johnny. From late 1890’s to 1935, John Key owned the only store at the crossroads. He was also the Postmaster General from 1900-1917 and operated the Robertsville Post Office from the store. His home was located north of the store on the present day South*
Hickory Lane. (South Hickory Lane was a part of the original Old State Highway 61-Clinton/Oliver Springs Turnpike.)

In a book written by Grace Raby Crawford, Back of Oak Ridge, she writes about Key: “The first store I remember as a child was located in Robertsville and was owned by John W. Key, a man whom to know was to love and respect. He was a deacon in the Baptist church and a Sunday School teacher for his entire active life. The children loved him dearly, for never a child came to his store and went away empty handed. He always gave them candy in some form or a piece of fruit and he gave them many words of praise and encouragement. This store was also used as a voting precinct for Robertsville voters and at one time housed a post office.”

**Historical note:** Uncle Johnny and wife died in 1937, having no children; the store was assumed by his cousin, William “Bill” Key. In 1935 a second store opened at the crossroad, the Lockett Store. The Lockett Store building survives today, owned by Kim Son’s restaurant.

(This map is looking from the top of Black Oak Ridge area-south- toward the crossroad)

*Photo made possible by Donald Raby*

(The actual path of Crumley is not known but based on his testimony; this is the most likely route.)
Uncle Johnny Key saved Crumley’s life. Crumley mentioned knocking on farmhouse doors throughout his journey, only to be denied help. Key was a beloved member of the community, and putting all risk and family safety aside, took Crumley in and began first aid. He contacted the local doctor and initiated the alarm to the authorities.

Crumley told the authorities he believed the murder happened around 9:20 p.m., and he had been trying to find help ever since. At ten minutes past midnight, a call was finally placed to Lewis’ son-in-law, Edward H. Steere. Lewis was originally planning to visit his daughter and Steere during the trip. They lived on Jacksboro Road in Clinton, not far from the Watt Hotel. Jacksboro Road is presently Main Street. Steere was given the approximate location of Lewis’ body. At daybreak, after an exhausting, several-hour search, Steere finally located the chert pit and body. Steere described the scene: George was lying on his back with his hands tied behind him, a gag tied in his mouth, three or four wounds to the back of his head, his pockets turned out, his jugular vein cut, and a small knife placed upon the middle of his torso. Ethel C. Cross, the undertaker, was immediately called to remove the body. The cause of death was listed as, “murdered throat cut, skull crushed.” George Andrew Lewis, one month shy of his 45th birthday, was taken to the home of his daughter and eventually transported to Chattanooga for a family burial.

Chapter 5

The Bank

The four men had no idea that anyone survived their attack. They left the chert pit area around 9:30 p.m. and headed toward Harriman on Old State Highway 61, arriving near Harriman by 2:30 a.m. Tom Christmas wanted to stop by his mother’s house for a moment before they continued to Oakdale Bank and Trust. At approximately 3:30 a.m., the four arrived in Oakdale and drove to the bank. Stephens and McClure, carrying a leather bag, got out of the car and worked their way to the back of the bank building. There, they broke out a window, climbed into the bank and hid behind the bank cage, ready to ambush the cashier when he opened up for business. Christmas and Petree, in the meantime, took the Chandler up the hill from the bank and waited.

Location:

The bank was located on the present-day corner of Camp Austin Road and Hillside Road in Oakdale, directly across from the Historical Marker indicating the location of the Babahatchie Inn, also known as the Railroad YMCA. The getaway car was parked above the bank on Hillside Road.
About 8 a.m., cashier Sam Oakley unlocked the front door of the bank to begin the day. Several town’s men were waiting at the bank for it to open. The previous day was payday at several businesses, and the men wanted to cash their checks. Stephens and McClure had no way of knowing that they were about to meet such a large group. Oakley entered the bank and walked toward the cashier cage when the two bandits, wearing masks and false mustaches, jumped up from behind the counter. Oakley instantly recognized Stephens, false mustache and all. He had known Stephens, who grew up in Oakdale, for several years. McClure held a pistol on Oakley while Stephens walked around the counter to the group of men standing by the front door to cover them. Everyone in the bank was commanded to put their hands up. Three or four men closest to the front door decided to make a break. They managed to open the door and run into the streets, sounding the alarm. (One newspaper account claims a little girl, also in the bank, was the first one to start yelling once on the street.) Stephens quickly made his way to the front door to lock it behind the fleeing group. Knowing the bank scheme was foiled, he ran toward the back of the bank and yelled to McClure, “Let’s get out of here!” McClure grabbed the empty loot bag, and both climbed out the back window.

Chapter 6

The Chase

Fleeing the bank, the two men headed up the hill toward the Chandler. Petree and Christmas started up the car, and with all four inside, drove back down the hill at a high rate of speed, passing in front of the bank. Losing no time, Oakley and several other men jumped into their cars in hot pursuit; the chase was on. The roads were rocky and hard to drive, but the Chandler was no match for the smaller vehicles. Ironically, it was no match for its driver either. Whoever was driving lost control of the Chandler around a curve and wrecked the car, hanging the back end over the Emory River Bridge. The four men fled southwest down the railroad tracks along the Emory River. By the time Oakley and the men reached the wrecked car, the four were gone.

The search continued all day. Soon after the robbery attempt, the story about the stolen Chandler and a murdered man on Black Oak Ridge started to unfold to police and county residents. Oakley temporarily left the posse and went to the location where Lewis was murdered. By the time he had gotten there, the body had already been removed. Oakley left the pit and met back up with the posse later that morning. Oakley and his men decided to board a freight rail and travel in the direction the men were last seen heading. By 2 p.m., the posse spotted the four sitting on the tracks near a narrow hollow surrounded by bluffs. Oakley and his men quickly jumped off the train and raced toward the men. Petree and McClure were captured in a culvert near the tracks. The posse spotted Christmas and Stephens fleeing over a hill and fired several shots, but they were able to elude capture.

Petree and McClure were brought in by Oakley’s men to the Harriman jail. Anger and hostilities were swelling among the residents of Oakdale, Harriman and Robertsville. Walter W. Roberts, Sheriff of Roane County, as well as being the Harriman’s Chief of Police, knew the jail in Harriman was not secure enough to guard against an attacking mob. Expecting trouble, deputies stayed up the first night to guard the prisoners against the potential dangers. By morning, the decision was made to transport the prisoners to Knoxville. The Knoxville jail was much more secure with a larger police force. Sheriff Roberts deputized a Harriman restaurant owner, Jim Delosier, to help transport the two captured men to Knoxville.

McClure started making voluntary, incriminating statements almost immediately. Sheriff Roberts testified that McClure said it was not their initial intention to kill anyone. The plan was to tie them up and take the car. But when they got to the pit, they decided that “dead men tell no tale” and they had better “top them off.” Delosier corroborated these statements. McClure explained they chose the car for its size and speed. They had searched Harriman for a vehicle, but could find nothing that
suited their needs. He also denied being present at the time the two men’s throats were cut, stating that he went into the woods to look for a tree to tie the men to. He also admitted to his part in the attempted bank robbery, stating that he put a false mustache on and held the gun on the head cashier.

Petree also made incriminating statements to Sheriff Roberts and Delosier. He stated that the knife was offered to him to cut the throats of Lewis and Crumley, but he refused, telling the others this was not the original plan. The one offering the knife responded, “Have you lost your nerve?” and then proceeded to cut Lewis’ throat. Petree did not mention the name of the cutter.

It was during the initial capture of Petree and McClure that the names of the other two men involved were made known, Christmas and Harry Wilson. Wilson was an alias for Stephens, who had earlier arranged for the alias because he was worried about being identified. Ironically, Petree and McClure had no idea that the bank manager instantly identified Stephens.

The search continued for Christmas and Stephens. Some newspapers were using the Wilson alias, while others were naming Stephens, incorrectly spelling it as Stevens. Some newspapers also suggested three men were at large. Posse numbers began to swell as reward money totaling $900 was offered for the capture of the two men. News of the reward brought bounty hunters, mountain men and farmers to Morgan County. Newspapers estimated as many as 500 men were combing the countryside, looking for the two men on the lam. Bloodhounds were brought in from Knoxville to aid in the hunt.

For the next three days, reports started filtering in that the two men had been seen in various locations around Morgan and Roane counties. Posses were thoroughly scouring the mountainsides. The general sightings were pointing searchers to a northerly direction from Harriman, somewhere in the Wartburg area. As the posses were attempting to track the two down, Sheriff Roberts and Oakdale Sheriff J.C. Cooper were patiently waiting back at their offices for more information to surface.

Christmas and Stephens had made their way on the railroad line to Nemo, roughly 15 miles north of Oakdale. In the first 36 hours after their escape, they expertly trekked through the woods, eluding the pursuing posses. Both men were familiar with the mountain areas and made their way to
houses in an attempt to find food. Finding one house empty, they were able to scavenge only one can of salmon. On several occasions, they spotted the posse searching nearby.

Eventually, they made their way north to Nemo to the home of a friend of Christmas, who gave them aid and comfort. There, they were able to hide in a cave located about two miles west of the friend’s home. They came down twice a day for their meals. From the security of the woods, the two witnessed the posse coming to their friend’s house a few times, asking if the fugitives had been seen.

After two weeks, they were tiring of the situation. Christmas must have known their continued stay in the cave above their friend’s home could not last indefinitely, and with the posse numbers increasing, it was most likely just a matter of time before they would be discovered. Also, Christmas’ friend was compounding his involvement every day and would run the inevitable risk of legal problems for himself. After some discussion, it was decided that Christmas’ friend would go into Oakdale and meet with Christmas’ brother, Lee. It was arranged that Lee Christmas would drive Tom Christmas and Stephens out of the area. As Lee brought the two men out of the mountainous area, down steep winding roads, Sheriff Roberts and his four man posse were waiting with weapons drawn. Stephens and Tom Christmas surrendered without incident.

(Photo taken by Knoxville Journal and Tribune June 16, 1921)

Sheriff Roberts deputized his brother Frank and the other three men who were normally business owners. No doubt, they were dependable fearless men.
The capture made Sheriff Roberts a local celebrity. People were constantly asking him to relay the facts of the arrest. Roberts eventually spoke to the press and indicated that he suspected the men were in the area the entire time, as a result of the noose placed around the mountains by the posse. He felt escape was impossible and capture was inevitable. Alf Taylor, Tennessee’s governor, was not as convinced and made comments that he suspected the men had successfully fled the area. After capture, Sheriff Roberts made it a point to explain that he ran down all clues and had Lee Christmas under surveillance day and night. Then one night, Lee was observed driving out to a location called Lover’s Leap. The Sheriff and a four-man posse followed Lee and waited for his return. As Lee Christmas and two other occupants in the vehicle came down the hill, the posse stopped the car and arrested Christmas and Stephens.

Location:

*The area of captured called Lover’s Leap is known today as Eagle Point, a popular kayaking area.*

*All four murderers*

*Charles Petree-John McClure-(Sheriff Roberts standing behind) Otto Stephens-Tom Christmas*
Chapter 7

The Trial

Christmas and Stephens were transported to the Knoxville jail and incarcerated with Petree and McClure early morning June 16th. Unlike Petree and McClure, Christmas and Stephens made no statements to the sheriff. They remained fairly silent, only once denying they knew the other two men in jail. Subsequently, a Knoxville jailer reported to the press that Stephens admitted to being the one who handled the killing. Stephens also was quick to point out the others were involved. Christmas later spoke to the press and explained how they eluded capture by hiding out in the cave near Nemo.

The story had so many captivating components – a car theft, gruesome murder, heroic escape, attempted bank robbery, car chase, posses, spectacular captures – it’s no wonder newspapers were selling out. The murder was considered one of the most horrendous acts in the history of East Tennessee. Knoxville crowds poured into the jail house. People from surrounding counties also wanted to view the desperados. A thousand people were estimated to have visited the jail to view the four men, a prelude to what was to become at the actual trial.

Crumley was also becoming a regional hero, giving his account of the murder and tale of his survival to the press from his front porch in Knoxville, with neck wounds still apparent. Newspapers around the country were reporting the story.

On Saturday, June 25th, Crumley was waiting for the grand jury verdict. After lunch at the Park Hotel in Clinton, word came that the jury was ready to announce its decision. Arriving at the Clinton courthouse, Crumley was present when a True Bill was issued. Newspapers reported Crumley wept with the announcement. Also present was Lewis’ grieving daughter, Alta Lewis Steere, as well as the father of defendant Petree. The trial was set for July 18th.

Two days before the trial, reports were starting to make their way to the press about the expected number of spectators who would be attending the trial. The courtroom seating capacity was 300, but estimates of crowd sizes were much higher. Standing room only was anticipated. Roane County businessmen were reporting that every available car had been rented in the county; surrounding county businessmen were reporting the same thing. Train tickets were beginning to sell out, and hotel rooms were booked all across the area. The stage was shaping up to be one of the most sensational trials in Tennessee history.

Governor Taylor requested Tennessee Attorney General W.H. Buttram to be the lead prosecuting attorney, along with S.G. Heiskell from Knoxville, J.H. Wallace and J.H. Underwood from Clinton and W.Y. Boswell from Oakdale. The defense team was led by William Hannah from Harriman, P.B. Whitaker from Chattanooga, John M. Davis and Charles Davis from Wartburg, D.W. Berge from Oakdale, W.H. Buttram, Jr. from Huntsville (son of the Attorney General), and D.A. Wood from Coal Creek.

On July 18th, the population of Clinton was double its normal size. City officials stated the crowds were larger than any Anderson County Fair crowds had ever been. Trains were arriving full with
passengers. Taxis were lined up at the depot, ready to ferry the crowd to the courthouse less than a mile away. Street vendors poured into the city, setting up food stands on the corners surrounding the courthouse. Street performers were also on the route. A blind boy at one area was singing for coins. Cigar and cigarette girls were parading up and down the courthouse hallways.

The courtroom was jam-packed. Roughly 500 people were squeezed into a room meant for 300. Others not as lucky crammed the hallways and the courthouse steps. Chairs were a premium. A local furniture store sold out of its chair inventory the first day. Spectators were seen leaving the courtroom every day with their chairs. Verbal scuffles over seating occurred. Squatters’ rights seemed to prevail, regardless of the true owner of the chair. One man, concerned for his wife, protested to the press; she had entered the courthouse at 7 a.m. and refused to get out of her seat until the end of the day.

The July heat was also oppressive; the courtroom was like an oven. Above the crowd noise, Judge Xenophon Hicks demanded an alleyway be formed from the window to the witness box. Spectators, unwilling to relinquish their spots, refused to move. It was ordered that anyone who was not obeying the command would suffer a $5 fine. Still, no one moved. Furious, the judge left his bench and climbed over the top of tables and chairs to exact his orders. The bailiff finally created an alley. However, the heat was still sweltering. At one point, women fainted, while others became ill.

When Crumley took the stand on July 21, the crowd became abnormally silent, hanging on every word. Crumley described, in detail, the horror of the night. If there was any doubt about the four men’s guilt, it ended with Crumley’s testimony.

The Stephens family, in an attempt to save their son, entered testimony about his insanity. They claimed that insanity ran in their family and that their son suffered from mental impairment. Several family friends testified on behalf of Stephens, but the prosecution witnesses countered any claims. Neighbors of “the Stephens boy” testified they knew of no mental issues or mental spasm with Otto and that he appeared to be a normal kid growing up. No medical doctors were available to testify for Stephens; Ms. Stephens said she was not able to afford that type of witness.

On Monday, July 25th, the case ended. The jury was given instructions by Judge Hicks and sent out for deliberations. Late Tuesday night, the jury informed the bailiff they had reached their decision.

Chapter 8

The Verdict

The carnival atmosphere had reached a pinnacle Wednesday morning, judgment day. The courthouse was at its fullest with crowds pouring out from the hallways to the steps and into the streets. The jury was ushered into a standing room only crowd. The judge immediately got down to business and asked the jury if it had reached a verdict. The presiding juror rose. It was apparent to the crowd that the jurors were under stress. As the foreman read his statement, his body began to shake and tears began to flow. It was hard to hear what he was saying in his quivering voice. Pausing to gain his composure, he continued: “Guilty in the first degree” with the sentence recommendation of death.

The crowd reacted immediately. Gasps were heard, many wept, and reporters ran out of the room yelling the verdict down the hallway and into the streets. In the courtroom, pandemonium ensued. Stephens’ mother fainted when hearing the verdict. The little, frail, old lady crumpled to the ground. In a gesture of compassion, Attorney General Buttram immediately went to her side, picked Ms. Stephens up, laid her head in his lap and fanned her with a newspaper. After calm had been restored, Judge Hicks sentenced the men to die on Sept. 15, 1921, by electrocution. The men were immediately transported to the Tennessee State Penitentiary in Nashville.
Chapter 9

The Execution

Appeals were made by the defense team, resulting in a delay of the original execution date. Hopes were high among the defendants that a new trial would be granted. The argument for a mistrial was based on mainly two points. First, certain jury members had admittedly formed opinions as to the guilt of the four defendants. Second, the judge denied a request to separate the defendants’ cases into four distinct trials, giving the opportunity for the four to be witnesses on behalf of the others. In regard to the first point, the law allowed for jurors to form an opinion based on media accounts of the crime, as long as the juror made the statement that he could judge the case in a “fair and impartial” manner. With assurances made, the jurors were seated.

The second point seemed to be the biggest source of confusion for the defendants and their families. McClure, Petree and Christmas all seemed to be under the impression that since they claimed publicly they were not technically responsible for the act of killing Lewis, they should be found innocent of that part of the crime and gain reprieve from the death sentence. The defendants believed the others would testify to their innocence.

All four defendants refused to take the witness stand, so the court and jury never heard any claim of innocence from the defendants. As a result, it became the first death penalty case in Tennessee history where the defendants had not taken the witness stand in their own defense.

After the Supreme Court of Tennessee reviewed the case, the high court upheld the guilty verdict, finding no errors in the lower court’s ruling and setting the new execution date for March 1, 1922. Having exhausted their last hope for a judicial decision to save them from the electric chair, their final hope rested with Governor Taylor.

As the March date neared, pressure mounted on Governor Taylor. Friends and family of the defendants and opponents of capital punishment inundated the governor with requests to commute the condemned men’s death sentences to life imprisonment. Mothers of the condemned pleaded on numerous occasions to the governor, begging him to commute the sentence to life in prison.

The day before the execution, Lee Christmas followed the governor through the governor’s office building, begging on behalf of his brother. The interruption to the governor’s day was so great, he told the trailing group of family, friends and reporters that he would issue his statement in the evening paper, and then fled to the governor’s mansion to escape the constant interruptions.

That evening, the complete statement from the governor appeared in papers across the state. The opening statement explains the exact position of the State in response to the perceived innocence of at least three of the defendants:
“If two or more persons enter into a conspiracy to commit a crime and in carrying out that conspiracy another crime is committed, all are equally guilty.

Whether capital punishment is right or wrong, it is the law of the land, and men must know it will be enforced so long as it remains the law.

Men of the future, as well as men of the present, must be given afresh to understand that if they commit murder, either individually or collectively, they must pay the penalty, even though the penalty be death!

The majesty of the law must be upheld. Those charged with the sworn duty, especially, must uphold it with a firm and unerring hand. The safety of our society demands it.

To shoot a man down is horrible, to cut his throat in cold blood is horrible, to tie men’s hands behind them and then gag them and then cut their throats is unspeakable horrible. This is the crime for which four men stand convicted. Lewis begging for his life, died floundering in his own blood, Crumley survived to tell the awful story, ‘Murder will out!’

I see no valid ground for executive clemency.” Governor A. Taylor

That night, after hearing the news, the defendants prepared themselves by writing letters and seeing visitors. Some of the letters were published, portions of which were laced with resentment, blaming others for their plight. Visitors to the cell block, referred to as the ‘Death House,’ reported the men as appearing calm and stoic. Their last meal was described as relaxed with the men sharing food items between themselves.

Sheriff Roberts came through the cell block, talking to the men. The governor had made the sheriff a temporary guard of the prison. But by daybreak, Sheriff Roberts decided he was no longer interested in staying for the execution. His brother, Frank Roberts, assumed the temporary guard role.

The execution was slated for dawn. However, the day began drearily with clouds and rain. McClure’s attorney, D.W. Byrge, arrived to finish up McClure’s will. Byrge was in the cell when the process of execution began. An hour earlier, Petree was experiencing severe anxiety, and the warden was afraid that he would completely collapse during the others’ executions. It was decided that Petree would go first.

At 6:15 a.m. on March 1, 1922, Charles Petree, age 23, was strapped to the electric chair at Tennessee State Penitentiary’s Death House in Nashville, approximately 10 feet from the holding cells of the other three condemned prisoners.

Byrge was completing McClure’s paperwork in his cell when Petree was electrocuted. Byrge described the scene, stating large columns of black smoke rose from the chair and billowed down the hallway where the other men were held.

The execution of Petree only took five minutes. Tom Christmas, age 26, was next at 6:30 a.m., followed by Otto Stephens, age 29, at 6:40 a.m., and lastly, John McClure, age 26, at 6:47 a.m.

Byrge mentioned that the black columns of smoke occurred with each execution. He also stated he would never want to witness anything like it again. Also witnessing the execution was Lewis’ daughter.
The black column of smoke Byrge witnessed was not a malfunction; it was normal for the chair, and had given rise to its nickname, “Old Smokey.” The chair was constructed of lumber from the dismantled penitentiary gallows in 1913. Over the course of its service, 125 men were executed by electrocution. Today, the chair is on permanent display at the Alcatraz East Crime Museum.

This was the first time in Tennessee history – and most likely the last – that four men were executed on the same day.

Epilogue

The Victims

This crime contains a couple of “firsts” for the State of Tennessee. It was the first time that four men were ever executed on the same day, and the first time in a death case where the defendants did not take the witness stand. Those strings of firsts, however, mean nothing to the victims and their families, who suffered the most. Their lives were permanently changed by a group of men that chose a path of crime as their way of income.

Andrew Crumley’s heroism not only saved him, but brought justice to the Lewis family and the surrounding communities, supplying closure to the wounds inflicted by the four bandits. Crumley, 28 years old, remained in Knoxville and raised his young family. He passed away in 1964, but many of his relatives reside in Knoxville today.

George Lewis was only a month shy of his 45th birthday when he died. He lived in the same boarding house with Crumley. George was a widower, having lost his wife in 1916 to tuberculosis. At the time of his murder, George had a son, Earl J. Lewis, who had served in WWI. During his service, he suffered a mustard gas attack that scarred his lungs for the rest of his life. Ironically, almost exactly ten years to the day after George’s murder, Earl was killed in a car accident.

George’s oldest child, Alta Lewis Steere, suffered greatly from her father’s murder. George was planning to visit Alta and his grandson on that fateful night. By the age of 25, she had lost both of her parents. Alta sat through every moment of the trial and gained the strength to witness the execution. Her husband, Edward Steere, was a successful supervisor at Magnet Mills in Clinton. During Edward Steere’s career, he made important discoveries that improved the hosiery manufacturing industry. The couple resided on Jacksboro Pike in Clinton, near the home of Judge Hicks. They had one young son, Edward Henry Steere, Jr., at the time of the murder. He grew up to earn the Silver Star during WWII – a heroic feat that certainly would have made his grandfather proud.

It is evident that George loved his children and that family was important to him. George was originally from Chattanooga, where he and his wife, Sallie, had raised their family. They married in 1895 when they both were 19 years of age. George worked in a curtain factory and later as a clerk for the Express Keeper. In September 1918, he was still living in Chattanooga, according to his draft registration card. At that time, he listed his son as serving in France. By 1920, Earl was 22 years old and out of the service. He was listed on the U.S. Census as living with his sister and brother-in-law in Clinton and working as a machinist at the hosiery mill. George must have moved around 1919 to Knoxville to be close to his two adult children.

As I was preparing to write this story, I was explaining the events to my wife and she asked me a question I had never considered: “Why didn’t George get out of the taxi in Clinton like he’d planned?” The question required me to retrace the facts and dig deeper. Here are my thoughts:

The taxi pulled into Clinton at 8:20 p.m. The boarding house, Watt Hotel, would only have been a couple of blocks away from where George’s daughter lived. That would have been the perfect time to
walk away from the taxi. It would have been too late to visit his daughter on the return trip from the “country.”

The answer was obvious – George Lewis was a hero. He refused to leave his friend, Andrew Crumley. Crumley, from the moment they pulled out of Knoxville, was concerned about the illegal nature of the men’s activity. That was, most likely, the very reason he went to the boarding house initially to pick up a friend to travel with him. Crumley wasn’t concerned about murder; he was concerned about Prohibition. When they pulled up that evening to the Watt hotel in Clinton and saw two more men getting into the taxi, warning bells went off in the minds of Crumley and Lewis. McClure even mentioned to the press that Crumley repeatedly asked them at the Watt Hotel about being bootleggers or carrying burglar’s tools in their luggage.

Crumley and Lewis most certainly suspected that something was wrong. That’s the most likely answer to why Lewis stayed with Crumley.

The conviction and execution began the healing process in the surrounding communities. Attorney General and lead prosecutor, W. H. Buttram, predicted during closing arguments, “This is a trial that will be remembered 100 years hence.” Memory of the trial lasted long enough for a ballad to be penned, part of which read:

Mr. Crumley was struck on the head
His throat was cut and left for dead
He layed on the ground ever so still
Until he heard the car go up the hill
He had been hand in hand with death
So he just layed still and helt his breath
By the help of God on high
His time had not yet come to die....

By John Smith

(Circling Windrock Mountain by Augusta Grove Bell - 1998)

Certainly, the trial and story lasted in the minds of the generation who experienced it but became less discussed as time faded the nightmare into a foggy memory.

As the hundred year anniversary grows nearer, it time to reflect on the story and remember the lives that were affected, and to honor the memories of Andrew Taylor Crumley and George Anderson Lewis.

Mark W. Griffith
Historical Photo’s and Maps

Old Robertsville Baptist Church

The church was located on an old wagon road. Today, the Faith Bible Fellowship Church is on the same site located at 145 Iroquois Road.

Permission of photo by Donald Raby (www.kingstondemolitionrange.com)

Original log cabin located at the Collins Roberts Crossroad was owned by Collin Roberts and called Collins Roberts Tavern. The cabin was eventually purchased by the Lockett family around 1935. It sat on the southeast corner of the crossroad. (Present day Raleigh Road)

Across the street the new Lockett Store can be seen. To the right of the cabin John W. Key’s home can be seen behind the corn stalk.

Note the sign on the cabin 'Clabber Girl', a baking product company circa 1923.

Photo permission by Donald Raby (www.kingstondemolitionrange.com)
This is the new Lockett Store built in 1935
Located on the west side of Old State Highway 61 (present day west side of Raleigh Road).

The Key Store (in the distance) was owned by John W. Key until his death in 1937.
The road between the two stores is Robertsville Road.
Photo by permission of Donald Raby (www.kingstondemolitionrange.com)

(Kim Son’s restaurant is presently located in the historic building above.)
Robertsville 1942

Map by permission of Donald Raby
Robertsville with Oak Ridge Street Overlay

By Ron Raymond
Following Maps

Courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey

1893 Map of Robertsville and area
(Present Day Oak Ridge)

1936 Map of Robertsville and area
(Present Day Oak Ridge)
Mark has been a part of the Mortgage Investors Group management team for over 20 years. He opened the Oak Ridge office for MIG in 1994 and has assembled one of the most productive sales and support teams in the business. The Oak Ridge office has produced, on the average, over 80 million dollars of loans per year for the last 18 years. Two of his Loan officers have earned repeated Top Producer Awards recognitions in the Knoxville and surrounding markets as well as Top National Honors. The Oak Ridge office has been #1 Lender in Anderson County for several years.

Mark got into the Real Estate business in 1983 and became a Mortgage Loan Officer in 1985. From interest rates in the teens to the market collapse of 2008, Mark has experienced a wide range of market and guideline fluctuations that make him one of the top managers in his field.

Mark gladly joined The Housing Hour, as Co–Host and Executive Producer, in December of 2011; his main role is programming/website content/scheduling and community service initiative. He contributes a wide range of blog topics ranging from industry issues to historical events.

Other blogs of interest:

**Oak Ridge Pool Turns 70**

**The Mayflower and The Letter That Launched A New World**

**The Liquidity Factor**

**The History of American Suburbia**
Special Acknowledgements

In 1921, Sheriff Walter W. Roberts formed a posse to apprehend the murders.

In the summer of 2015, I had to form a posse to track down the-almost forgotten- locations of the crime.

My Posse:

Kevin Rhea – assisted in historical context and content. Kevin discovered the Ballad of Andrew Crumley, ‘...you know it's famous if there’s a song written about it.’

Dennis Eggert: Historian of Pre-Oak Ridge-specializing in Robertsville, Tn. (if it were not for Dennis- the location of the chert pit would have possibly been lost forever.)

Fred Eiler: Historian of Pre-Oak Ridge-specializing family names, farms and old roads.

Donald Raby: Expert Historian of Pre-Oak Ridge-specializing in the Scarboro area and all historic Churches. Don owns an extensive collection of historic photographs of the area.

Eva Wells McCarty, Arlis Wells, Robert Wells (Original pre-Oak Ridge residents) and Leo York: who remembered the location of the Chert Pit. They called the area, ‘The Sand Pit’. The pit was like a community sandbox for the children. The Well’s parents told them of a murder that occurred in the pit but never relayed the details of the incident.

Anderson County Historical Society – Stephanie Hill’s knowledge of Clinton was important to understand locations and road names.

Morgan County Genealogical & Historical Society – supplied key information on the location of Oakdale Bank and Trust and ‘capture’ location.

Jama Griffith (my wife) – expert in genealogy. She unlocked the Key Store chain of ownership as well as historical background information of George Lewis and family.

Ron Raymond – computer map expert- created the first-ever computer generated historical road overlay of Robertsville and present-day Oak Ridge for this project.

Ray Smith- journalist and expert historian of Oak Ridge. Ray has written an important collection of historical articles: http://smithdray1.net/orhpa/

Keith McDaniel – whose oral history interview with James Brennan began this journey.

Oral History of James Brennan, Interviewed by Keith McDaniel, November 2, 2011
Special Thanks

To Kevin Rhea and Mortgage Investors Group whose resources, passion and love for their community made this project possible.

To Dennis Eggert and Fred Eiler who-after dozens of emails, several locational meetings and at least one discussion over milkshakes at Sonic- patiently helped me with understanding the context of pre-Oak Ridge History.

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(Supreme Court Appeal)

Clinton Courthouse Case Documents have been destroyed by flood

Anderson News

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Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection

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Private Photo Collection of Donald Raby
kingston demolitionrange.com

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