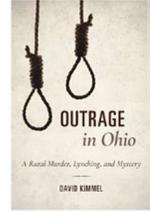


On a hot and dusty Sunday in June 1872, 13-year-old Mary Secaur set off on her two-mile walk home from church. She never arrived. The horrific death of this young girl inspired an illegal interstate pursuit-and-arrest, courtroom dramatics, conflicting confessions, and the daylight lynching of a traveling tin peddler and an intellectually disabled teenager. Using a unique blend of historical research and contemporary accounts, *Outrage in Ohio* explores how a terrible crime ripped an Ohio farming community apart and asks us to question what really happened to Mary Secaur.



One of a series of documents that provide extra information related to the book, the piece below is actually the introduction from the book.

Outrage in Ohio: Introduction

By David Kimmel

Two bodies slowly turn on the ends of ropes. A soiled ribbon rests on a table. A young man sits in a cell, measuring out the days, weeks, months. A mother and father set out a black-draped photo of their foster daughter. Hogs rooting in the hot undergrowth smell blood, sense food is near. A crowd retraces its steps, puffs of dust clinging to shoes, to legs. Riders race into a town square with pistols drawn. The pages of an open testament ruffle in the slight breeze. A hand transcribes a dying wish. Somewhere in this heap of broken images the truth lies.

Celina, Mercer County, Ohio-- Sunday, June 30, 1872

George shifted uncomfortably on the hard wooden bench in the front row of the tiny courthouse. He shifted his feet, and the iron shackles clanked against the floor. The air hung with sweat and warm wool and nerves. In the windows, George could see the faces of townspeople and farmers peering into the gloom of the courthouse from the bright afternoon sunshine.

Behind the faces, more faces, some in trees, all straining for a glimpse of the proceedings. He turned around and looked back into the courtroom, all eyes turning to him in curiosity. He looked past them for his parents. At last he saw his mother, her face barely visible through the intervening heads and shoulders. She was looking down to her left, probably attending to Peck or Charlie. *Look up, look over here*, he commanded to no avail. Through the heads he could make out his father staring straight ahead.

To George's right on the bench sat one of the guards, and beyond him was Jake. In the first row directly in front of Jake sat McLeod and Ab. All three looked scared and much the worse for having spent two nights in the county jail. George imagined he didn't look much better. McLeod stared straight ahead, but Absalom gawked at the crowd. George saw Jake look around the guard at him. He gave his brother a thin-lipped smile, but Jake turned away. George's ears burned at the slight.

A sudden murmur swept the crowd behind him as a group of men in black robes strode into the room. All were large men, trim if graying, probably about the age of his father

and definitely--from the looks of their sunburnt faces--farmers, no matter what else they might be at the moment. A voice high above the crowd announced the three justices. George rose to his feet along with the rest of the people, then sat down with them.

George watched the glare on the large head of the man introduced as "Justice Snyder" who rose to address the courtroom, "I hereby recall this hearing to order. Just to be official, this is a hearing to consider the case of Alexander McLeod and Absalom Kimmel, who are charged, as if anyone didn't know, with the abduction, violation and murder of Mary Arabelle Secaur on Sunday, June 23, 1872 in Liberty Township of Mercer County, the State of Ohio. I remind all present that this is a hearing, only, and that should the case against the defendants be deemed sufficient, their case will be taken up by the Circuit Court of Common Pleas when it arrives in Mercer County in November. The prosecution may now open its case."

"Child Found Dead." *Mercer County Standard*, Thursday, June 27, 1872

On Monday afternoon last the body of a highly respected little girl, aged about 13 years, by the name of Mary Secore, who has been making her home with Mr. John Sitterly for some time past, was found about half a mile west of the residence of Mr. Strouse May, in Liberty township, this county, in a most horrible and mangled condition; the head being entirely separated from the body and the skull broke in several pieces, the flesh eaten from the body by hogs which had found it before search was made. The little girl had attended Sabbath school Sabbath afternoon, and was probably on her road home. We have learned nothing definite as to what caused her death, but from the many rumors afloat, suppose that some fiendish person had attempted an outrage, and fear of being detected, committed an atrocious murder. If a murder it be, the perpetrator of the heinous act should be ferreted out and suffer the penalty of the law, in its most rigid form.

Liberty Township, Mercer County, Ohio--Saturday, June 23, 1877

Daniel Mahoney

I first knew of the horror when Johanna came stumbling along through two rows of young corn, shouting and waving her arms. I stopped hoeing and wiped the grit off my own neck and face. She made a lot of noise before getting close enough to make any sense. By then she was so out of breath she could hardly speak.

"Yerrah, girl, catch yourself."

"Come help..." she puffed. Her face was red with the exertion. "The men're waiting."

"What men? Hold on now. What is it?"

“Mary, she’s gone!” Johanna got out, finally.

“Our Mary?” I dropped my hoe and set off for the house at a run.

“Nah, ‘tisn’t our Mary. Stop a second so a body can talk.” Johanna bumped into my back as I pulled up.

I turned and grabbed her shoulders. “Speak sense, then, woman. Who is it? What’s happened?”

“Young Mary Secaur’s after disappearing.”

“Mary Secaur? Is it Strouse’s granddaughter lives with the Sitterlys?”

“She never came home from the church, you know, and her folks fear the worst.”

I looked in the direction of the house but saw no one. “Who’d you say is at the house?”

“Wells, Sitterly, May and his son, and few others. You be running on and doing the necessary, Daniel.”

I looked at the tears welling up in her green eyes. I pulled her to myself and then set off for the house at a dead run. Six neighbors stood in our front yard.

“Come quick,” said Wells. He turned with the others, and we set off. “Johanna tell you what happened?”

“That she did. The grim business, it is.”

It took us a quarter of an hour to walk to the churchyard, where we met another four local farmers. Henry Hinton took charge, as always. He organized us into teams, and we set off down the road, retracing the girl’s steps from the previous afternoon.

It’s a good two miles from the church to Sitterly’s farm, and it’d be a hard walk on any hot summer day, but looking into every ditch, asking at every doorway, and peering into every thicket along the way took a good deal out of me. By four, I was hot, jaded and growing more and more anxious with every step. It’s hard work looking for something you hope you won’t find.

I’m glad it wasn’t me who found her. I was clear on the other side of the road, poking around some bushes, when I heard Meizner shout out.

Tiffin, Ohio--June 23, 2017

David Kimmel

Mary Secaur was a very real girl, and her death rocked her rural community in Western Ohio 145 years ago. The Kimmels were a very real family, original settlers whose descendants reach out from the past to this day. I am no innocent bystander. I am no objective observer. I am historian, detective, storyteller, family member. That last is vital.

My father grew up in Rockford, a small town just miles from the scene of these events. Though his aunts and uncles knew of Mary Secaur's case, he was innocent until the mid-1990s, when, like many newly retired people, he turned from the world of work to the work of tracing his roots. Tucked inside a letter from one of his Western-Ohio cousins, one paragraph caught his eye--a paragraph of rape, murder, retribution, regret. That was all he had, but it was enough to pique his interest. Dad did some more checking, both with relatives and online, and he was able to glean more information, including a photocopy of James Day's 1872 booklet, *Lynched!* which recounted the case in sensational, graphic terms. When Dad died in the fall of 1997, I inherited the case. The murder and what followed make for a gripping story, but that only partly explains why over the years--at the expense of other work I should have been doing--I have returned again and again to this project.

Disreputable at Best is an exploration of an 1872 case of murder and lynching in western Ohio. I have investigated the facts of the case, the lives of the participants, the community in which the events took place, the time period, but I have also explored the inner lives of the participants, the larger social implications of the events, the dynamics within this Western Ohio community. What you will not find here is a straightforward novel, marching onward from beginning to end in pursuit of a single narrative. Narratives have a way of dictating the "truth" of an event, of cutting off the "what-ifs" and "perhapses" of a situation as their authors make their way down the forking paths of storytelling. Instead of a single story, here is a collection of narratives--contemporary, historical and fictional. The contemporary voices are provided by newspaper accounts, an unpublished journal, and the semi-official booklet published just after the lynchings. Occasionally, I step in as narrator to tidy up loose ends or to provide some analysis of the case. The fiction comes in two flavors: some are fictionalized versions of real, documented events, while some I have imagined in order to explore real situations and people and relationships. Along the way I carefully note my sources and any departures from hard facts. So here is what I have discovered--and partially what I have imagined--about the Secaur-McLeod-Kimmel murders.