



MARYLAND LYNCHING TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

VICTIM PROFILE AND CASE FILE CHECK LIST

VICTIM PROFILE

NAME OF VICTIM: John Diggs

ALIAS: John Dorsey, John Williams, Henry

RACE: African American

GENDER: Male

AGE: 24

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Diggs' sister described him as "a very black, round headed man, between 20-23, about 5 ft. high, who stammered when he talked and blinked his eyes." To this description the police added that he was "dressed in dark coats and pants, slouch hat and white shirt."

LITERATE: Uncertain. Census records and newspaper accounts are conflicting.

MARITAL STATUS: Undetermined.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

FAMILY: Following the lynching officials found a letter to Diggs signed "Your affectionate father, John H. or John E. Williams. It was postmarked Washington DC. In addition to his unnamed mother, Diggs had an unnamed married sister who lived near DC's mental hospital. The Montgomery County census of 1870 includes a John Diggs close to the age of the lynching victim, living in a household headed by Harriet Diggs, however we have not been able to confirm with certainty that this is the victim and his family.

COMMUNITY: Montgomery County remained rural throughout the 1880s, consisting primarily of small farms. Of the 24,800 county residents recorded in the 1880 census, nearly one-third were Black. A few churches and schools such as Elijah Rest Methodist Episcopal Church and Pleasantville School were established in post-Civil War Montgomery County by formerly enslaved and free

Blacks, including those in Poolesville's Black community of Sugarland. Racial tensions remained high as evidenced by the 1880 lynchings in Montgomery County of both Peck and John Diggs. However, the length and specific location of Diggs' residence has not been confirmed.

CHILDREN: Unknown

OCCUPATION: Farm laborer/Harvest Hand

TOWN: The alleged crime occurred near Darnestown in Montgomery County MD.

BIRTHPLACE: Possibly Montgomery County Maryland

RELIGION: Unknown

ORGANIZATIONS: Undetermined

PERSONAL HISTORY: According to his employer, James Tschiffely, Diggs was from the Damascus area in Montgomery County and had been enslaved by Mr. King who owned a distillery. However, he may have been from Washington DC according to newspaper accounts or from Port Tobacco where his mother resided.

TANGENTIAL CASES (RACIALLY MOTIVATED HOMICIDES): In addition to Diggs, two other men were victims of racial terror lynching in Montgomery County: George Peck and Sidney Randolph. No one was held accountable for any of these crimes.

LYNCHING INVESTIGATION

RATIONAL FOR LYNCHING: Diggs was accused of physically and sexually assaulting Mary Lysle Tschiffely, the wife of his employer. The sexual relationship was consensual according to Diggs, although according to newspaper accounts, he subsequently admitted the rape but denied the physical assault.

KEY INDIVIDUALS/WITNESSES:

Mary Tschiffely, alleged victim

John Tschiffely, employer and spouse of alleged victim who was likely among the mob committing the murder

Amos West, neighbor who sheltered Mary Tschiffely

Zachariah Davis, who captured Diggs

Sheriff John Kelchener and Deputy Sheriff Kingsbury who were overpowered by lynch mob

Washington DC detectives, McDevitt and Acton, whose assistance was sought in the search for Diggs

Julius West whose property was the lynching site

Justices John Kiger and Mordecai Morgan who summonsed the jury of inquiry

Jurors who found that Diggs was strangled by unknown persons: R.S. Patterson, W.M. Davis, James Noland, J.P. Mulflinger, John Steele, W.A. Viers, W.H. Carr, Henry Vielt, J.T. Rickette, Capt. James Anderson, R.A. Sheckell, N.D. Offutt

Dr. Edward Anderson who examined Diggs' body

John H. or John E. Washington and unnamed sister of Diggs whose homes were searched before Diggs was captured.

W.R. Pumphrey, mortician

KEY LOCATIONS:

Home of John and Mary Tschiffely where Diggs lived and where the attack is said to have taken place
Home of neighbor Amos West where Mary Tschiffely sought shelter following the attack
Washington DC homes of Diggs' father and sister, which were searched
Store in Mechanicsville where Diggs was tied with rope to prevent his escape from Zachariah Davis
Montgomery County jail where Diggs was held
Montgomery County Almshouse where Diggs was interred

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS: There were no short-term political implications following Diggs' murder as was the case in nearly all lynchings occurring during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. National and local politicians often shared the views of the lynch mob members and the political will to effectively prosecute or enact appropriate laws did not exist. Lynchings, however, highlighted the social and legal injustices which would lead to the successful Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century.

PUBLIC AND POLITICAL REACTIONS: *The Aegis* reported that the lynching of Diggs was justified as he may not have been punished for his crime based on legal technicalities. There are no reports of the lynching being condemned by government or religious figures.

SOURCE & INVENTORY CHECKLIST:

Montgomery History, "The Story of John Diggs-Dorsey."
<https://montgomeryhistory.org/lynchings-in-montgomery-county/lynchings-john-diggs-dorsey/#:~:text=Diggs%2DDorsey%20was%20removed%20from,vio%20committed%20by%20parties%20unknown.%E2%80%9D> (Accessed 9-13-24)
FindAGrave #241221234 (John Diggs Dorsey)
Montgomery Co. MD Censuses of 1870 and 1880
The Baltimore Sun, 7-26-1880 p. 1 and 7-28-1880 p.1
The Aegis, 7-30-1880 p.2
The Democratic Advocate, 7-31-1880 p.2
The Maryland Union, 8-5-1880 p.2

We have not located primary source documents related specifically to the known lynchings in Montgomery County. However in the records of Montgomery County's Sandy Spring Museum there is a collection of diaries. One diary, kept by a local Doctor, Caleb Edward Iddings (1829-1904) contains a short entry on July 27th, 1880 that presumably speaks to the [lynching of John Diggs-Dorsey](#) in Rockville on the same day. The doctor writes: "Negro Ravisher arrested yesterday by Jos: Davis. was hung by Judge Lynch this morning at Rockville about sun Rise." The diary entry can be seen [HERE](#).

DEATH CERTIFICATE: Not found

CORONER'S REPORT: Not found

PHOTOGRAPHS:

EPHEMERA:

DIGITIZATION REQUEST:

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