

ON THE DEATH OF SAMUEL COMBS

Compiled by Harry G. Enoch, 2003

The Kentucky Gazette carried an obituary for Samuel Richardson Combs

We learn that Capt. Samuel Combs of Clarke county was killed a day or two since in a rencontre with a man in the streets of Winchester, the county seat. Capt. C. was an early and respected citizen of this State. He migrated here in times that tried the settler's courage and bore a conspicuous part.

Kentucky Gazette, October 5, 1833

More detail was provided in the Lexington Observer & Reporter:

To the Editors, dated
Winchester, Oct. 1

This morning about 8 o'clock, an unfortunate rencounter took place before the Court House door, between Samuel R. Combs and sons against two of the Bushes (sons of Ambrose), which terminated in the death of Samuel R. Combs, sen. His head was nearly separated from his body, the main artery being entirely separated. Combs had shot a man named Nelson the day previous with a pistol and was in custody of the Sheriff, and the Bushes were summoned as a guard. He died in about 30 minutes or less after he received the cut.

Lexington Observer & Kentucky Reporter, October 3, 1833

This is supplemented by the following undocumented account:

On October 1, 1833, Samuel R. Combs was brutally murdered by a young member of the neighboring Bush family. After his "throat had been cut from ear to ear, he called bystanders to come and see a brave man die. He lived only a few minutes, but long enough to dictate his will by holding his severed windpipe with his own hand."

Jane Gray Buchanan, Thomas Thompson and Ann Finney of Colonial Pennsylvania and North Carolina, pp. 172-73

I have combed various sources for a follow up on these murders, so far without success. Regarding Combs's murder, evidence points to James Bush (1800-1887) and Lamentation Bush (1807-). Both were sons of Ambrose Bush. There is an index to criminal cases in Clark County and the cases for 1832-1833 list two Bushes: James and Lamentation. Unfortunately, the case files for pre-1900 Clark County criminal cases have been lost--this according to the Circuit Court Clerk's office.

The Nelson shot by Combs has not been identified either, but there is a Combs-Nelson connection that almost certainly played a role in this matter. In January 1832 Sabrina Nelson sued Samuel R. Combs in Clark Circuit Court for slander and sought \$1,000 in damages. She called as witnesses Edward Nelson, Benjamin J. Miller, Elliott Holliday, Joseph Holliday, Waller Holliday, James Holliday, Manuel Wyatt, George Wyatt, Fleming Wyatt, Thomas Wyatt, and Thomas Hatton. The following are excerpts from the brief prepared by her attorney, Samuel Hanson:

Sabrina Nelson . . . is and from her nativity hath been a chaste woman and hath been so accounted by her neighbors & acquaintances. Nevertheless, the defendant . . . intending to injure and defame the said Sabrina, in a certain

conversation which the defendant had with divers good citizens of this Commonwealth of and concerning the said Sabrina . . . did with a loud voice falsely & maliciously utter and publish of and concerning the Plaintiff the following false, scandalous and malicious words, towit:

“She is a whore”

“I carnally knew her.”

“She went off with a bean in her belly.”

“She went off with a pumpkin seed in her belly.

“I had to do with her fifty times.”

“I have been as intimate with her as I have been with my own wife.”

“She is an unchaste woman.”

“She was pregnant with child.”

and “She is now pregnant with child.”

By means of speaking of which several false scandalous and malicious words, the Plaintiff saith she hath sustained damage to the amount of \$1,000. Wherefore she brings suit &c.

Sabrina Nelson vs S. R. Combs, Clark Circuit Court, Civil Cases, 1832

Following an agreement signed by Sabrina Nelson (her mark) and S. R. Combs on March 27, 1832, the case of was dismissed by the court, at the defendants cost.