

Authors Revisit Appalachian Crimes and Debunk Myths in New Book

When retired Detective Sergeant R. Scott Lunsford and editor Alfred Dockery began writing their book *Blood on the Blue Ridge: Historic Appalachian True Crime Stories 1808-2004*, they had no idea how much “detective work” would be needed to tell the stories they selected to research and write.

Two chapters, in particular, tested their ability to sort out the details and find the facts of the case: *The Nearly Fatal Footprint* and *A Deadly Reunion at Runion*.

The Nearly Fatal Footprint is the story of Henry West, accused of shooting James Craig from ambush at Bull Creek near Asheville in 1808. West had distinctive footprints due to an injury from his days as a sailor. His footprints near the crime scene and the deathbed testimony of the victim placed him on the scaffold with a noose around his neck.

“We knew the chain of events from the shooting to the conviction from newspaper articles,” said Lunsford. “What we didn’t know until a librarian at North Carolina Digital Collections helped us find the petitions in Governor Benjamin Williams’ papers was the backstory of Asheville’s leading citizens’ extraordinary efforts to gain West a pardon or that they kept their efforts a secret from him.”

Figuring out the timeline for the crime, arrests, and trial for the 1920 murder of Ella Henderson in *A Deadly Reunion at Runion* required getting the Superior Court minute docket from the North Carolina Archives.

“We found ourselves tangled in contradictory and incomplete newspaper reports,” said Dockery. “It was a mess. We didn’t know where or when the killer or the accomplice were arrested. We knew that bloodhounds were brought in but didn’t know if they were able to track anyone from the crime scene. There was even some question about how many children the Hendersons had.”

“You can imagine our relief when we got the transcript, and not only did it have witness testimony, but it was even typewritten. We finally had the Five Ws.”

However, both authors agree that the most satisfying part of the project was debunking the myth of the murdered mason in *The Unconquerable Nancy Franklin*.

The book’s 15 chapters cover crimes in the Blue Ridge region from 1808 to 2004, including murder, moonshining, train robbery, shootouts, and manhunts. It’s available on Amazon in Kindle ebook and paperback.