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# Contributors

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### From the Editors

In this issue of Ohio Valley History, we focus on questions of power in educational institutions, practices, and ideas. Who controls schools and universities, and for what purposes? What sorts of social relations should those institutions promote? What should be the place of the larger community in making educational decisions? What role should local, state, and national governments play, if any? Moreover, should questions of race and class and gender bear upon educational questions and, if so, how? These are the kinds of questions our three authors address in this issue. And they are timely questions. Even today we contest among ourselves about whether educators or parents, the state or local communities ought to govern our public schools, and how they should do so.

Ann Hassenpflug begins by drawing our attention to a spectacular murder case in antebellum Louisville. In 1853, when a young, rich and violent young man murdered his brother's teacher, he inadvertently launched not only a vigorous debate in that city about the conduct of schools and teachers, but also raised basic questions about fairness and justice amidst a new system of social and cultural relations that had come to dominate the Ohio Valley during what historians call the nineteenth-century "market revolution."

Kevin Bower then moves us into the twentieth century, investigating what happened to those Depression-era young people in Ohio who found themselves without jobs or hope. Through the New Deal's National Youth Administration, the federal government sought to avoid potential social chaos by implementing hundreds of local training and education projects. But they quickly ran up against a serious limitation implicit in schooling of every kind. Teachers (and the state that employs them) might educate their students, especially young working class men and women, to take up positions, both economic and social, that society and its economy cannot or will not supply.

Finally, David Wolfford examines the reluctance of many white residents of western Kentucky to give up segregation, especially segregated schools, during the 1950s and 1960s. Here the questions turn on race more than class, but the central issue still centers on a question of power. Who will control schools and for what purposes? Should the advantage that some whites enjoyed by attending segregated schools be continued or not, and who should say so—a local white majority opposed to school integration or a national majority

favoring integration? And what role should the state play in resolving such questions?

It should be noted that two books reviewed in this issue deal with similar educational issues. Joy Ann Williamson's *Black Power on Campus* explores many of the same questions raised in David Wolfford's article, only in this case on the campus of the University of Illinois in the late 1960s. Rick Nutt's *Many Lamps*, *One Light: Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary* documents a long-term struggle played out in the Presbyterian Church over whether fundamentalists or modernists should control the education of future clergy.

We hope you will find these articles stimulating. Taken together, they should shed some light on the historical roots of many of the conflicts and conundrums that face all of us today when thinking about and practicing education.

## Murder in the Classroom:

# Privilege, Honor, and Cultural Violence in Antebellum Louisville

ANN HASSENPFLUG

n Wednesday, November 2, 1853, Matthews F. Ward murdered principal teacher William H.G. Butler in his schoolroom in the Louisville High School in Louisville, Kentucky. On the previous day Butler had disciplined Ward's fifteen-year-old brother, William. Matt and the younger William were members of one of the wealthier families in the city and were

extremely well-connected in the state of Kentucky as a whole.

The tragic murder of William Butler and the public reaction to it supply insight into, but also raise questions about, class and sectional conflicts within the antebellum culture of Louisville. The murder, the subsequent trial, and ultimate acquittal of Matt created public outrage in Louisville and across the country. The Wards were part of a circle of powerful and wealthy Kentucky families, while William Butler was a self-employed schoolmaster from Indiana. The tragedy illuminates the relationship between students and teachers and between parents and teachers in antebellum schools. Moreover, while the southern code of honor played a significant part in the fateful events, they (and particularly their aftermath) suggest the limits of this code in the border city of Louisville. The urban setting as well as the diverse culture of the Ohio Valley region framed the unique circumstances of the tragedy and directed its equally unique outcome.

Other than their age, the principal antagonists could not have been more different. Matthews Flournoy

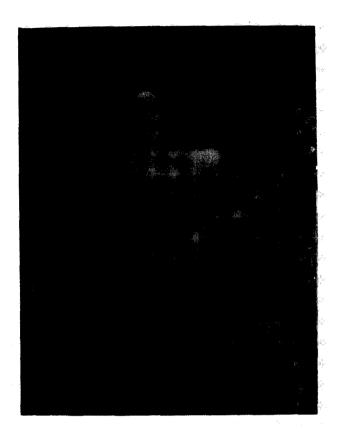
Ward (or Matt, as he was called) was a literary and well-educated young man who, after attending Harvard, had published two books about his travels in Europe, the Middle East, and England. He and William Butler were almost the same age. Butler was twenty-eight, and Matt, twenty-seven.<sup>1</sup> Each was married, but only Butler had a child.

The Wards were known for their flamboyant lifestyle. The senior Robert Ward was a land speculator as well as part owner of a very lucrative New



William H.G. Butler and his wife, Elizabeth Peck Butler. The Filson Historical Society





Sallie Ward Hunt Downs, the sister of the accused Matthews F. Ward, was well-known in Louisville for her dramatic behavior. This image, painted by George P.A. Healy, is of a portrait owned by the J.B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky. The Filson Historical Society

Orleans mercantile firm. He was also known for his gambling and patronage of the arts, and he even had a steamboat named after him. He had served in the Kentucky House of Representatives for six terms while living in Georgetown, Kentucky. After his first wife died, he married Emily Flournoy, descendant of wealthy Huguenot aristocrats who had fled France. In 1832 he moved his family to Louisville, and in 1838 built a luxurious mansion (the Wards property was valued at some eighty thousand dollars in 1851) where they held Louisville's first fancy dress ball in 1850, their nine slaves attending to their guests. That same year Ward's eldest daughter, Sallie, well-known in Louisville for her dramatic behavior, had been party to a scandalous divorce from the son of a U.S. ambassador to Great Britain. Within a year she married the second of her four husbands, Robert P. Hunt, a physician in Lexington, and moved to New Orleans. The Wards were closely connected with a circle of wealthy relatives and friends who, like them,

owned cotton plantations in Mississippi and Arkansas and spent part of each year on those plantations.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, William Butler's roots were in the North. His father had moved from Pennsylvania and owned a farm in southern Indiana, where William grew up. His family did not own slaves. Along with his brothers, Butler left the family farm to engage in middle class professions requiring advanced education. His older brother, Noble, later became well-known for his grammar textbooks and as a newspaper editor and educator in Louisville. One brother became a doctor, and another a lawyer.<sup>3</sup>

Butler's association with the Louisville High School was neither his first venture into teaching, nor was it his first encounter with the Ward children. Butler had previously taught in two schools in rural areas of Kentucky as well as in a private Louisville school run by his older brother, Noble Butler. William Butler had also been a tutor in the Ward home for twenty months before leaving in the summer of 1850 to travel in Europe to develop his proficiency in French, Spanish, Italian, and German so that he could establish himself as a teacher of modern languages. Mr. Ward had given him a letter of introduction to Matt Ward, who was also traveling in Europe, but their paths did not cross. During his time in Europe, Butler served as a delegate from the American Peace Society to the World Peace Convention in Frankfurt.<sup>4</sup>

When Butler returned from Europe, Mr. Ward wanted him to continue as a tutor in his home and offered him a salary equal to the potential income he would receive from his own school. Butler refused the request because he felt he could do better by running his own school. As such, Butler and his partner, Minard Sturgus, established the Louisville High School along with L. Wethrell, who left the school in the fall of 1853 owing to ill health and died soon after. Butler had probably become acquainted with the older Sturgus when Butler was a student at Hanover College in Madison, Indiana. Sturgus was a classics scholar and well-respected professor at Hanover, from which Butler graduated with honors. Indeed, Sturgus, Butler, and Noble Butler collaborated on a Latin textbook that was published after William Butler's death.

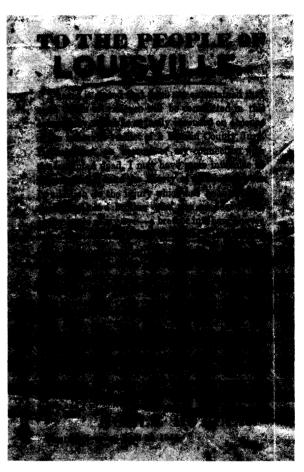
This broadside was published on April 29, 1854 by Noble Butler, the brother of William H.G. Butler, upon the acquittal of his murderer Matthews F. Ward. He urged citizens of Louisville to stay calm despite anger at the acquittal. The Filson Historical Society

he Louisville High School advertised its 1853 fall term of five months as beginning on August 29. The instructors offered courses in English studies as well as Latin, Greek, Modern Languages, and Mathematics, and also provided preparation for civil engineering. An additional attraction of the school was a gymnasium that Butler had purchased. This along with a spacious yard provided an opportunity for exercise. The tuition was forty dollars per term. Students could purchase school catalogs at a local bookstore.<sup>7</sup>

The episode began on November 1 when, contrary to school rules, William Ward had brought chestnuts into the classroom after a five-minute recess and gave them to several other boys during Butler's French class recitation that began at approximately ten o'clock. Ward had borrowed a knife from one of the boys and cut holes in the end of several chestnuts which he handed to a third boy with the request that he put cinnamon drops in them. Instead, this boy ate the nuts, leading to a quarrel with Ward. The teacher heard them and told them to stop talking.<sup>8</sup>

After class Butler noticed the shells on the floor and asked who had been eating the nuts. William Ward admitted that he had brought the chestnuts but had

distributed them before class, and insisted that he had not eaten any of them. Three boys claimed they received the chestnuts from Ward during class and two of them said they, along with Ward, had eaten the nuts during class. Butler administered corporal punishment to one boy (who later stated that the beating had not been severe) but he did not punish the second boy because he was a new student who was unaware of the teacher's rule against eating in the schoolroom.



After punishing one of the students, Butler again asked Ward if he had given out the nuts during class. William insisted that he had given them out before class and not eaten any himself. Butler informed him that because he was lying, he had to be punished. The accounts differ on the location where Butler administered this punishment. Emily Ward, William's mother, claimed that Butler pulled Ward out onto the classroom floor and struck him with a strap. However, a student stated that Butler took William into the recitation room for the whipping. The other student who Butler had punished apparently witnessed the strapping (wherever it had occurred) and claimed that the teacher hit Ward some six times across his lower legs, at times striking his leather boots. Following the punishment William Ward immediately grabbed his hat and left the school. His parents and older brother, Robert, were out of town, so that evening Ward told his oldest brother, Matt, that Butler had whipped him and called him a liar.<sup>10</sup>

his was not William Ward's first time being disciplined in the private Louisville High School. In May or June, Sturgus claimed that he had taken William "by the coat-collar, shook him, and boxed his jaws." After Ward reported this treatment to his mother, she insisted that Sturgus and Butler come to the Ward home. As soon as they arrived Mrs. Ward demanded to know what Sturgus "meant by treating a Ward in that manner." She claimed that she sent her children to Butler because she knew he would behave like a gentleman and, if her son needed correcting, he would do so appropriately.<sup>11</sup>

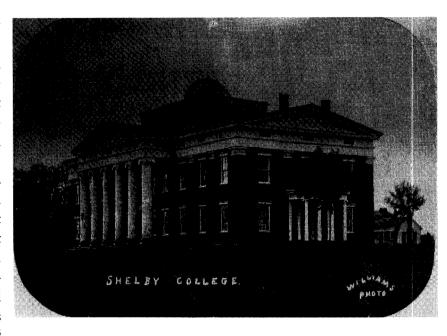
After Sturgus recounted his version of the incident, Mrs. Ward calmed down and apologized. During the conversation, she suggested that she might withdraw her sons from the school. Although Sturgus encouraged her to do that to avoid dismissal, she ended the conference by telling Sturgus that if there were further problems with her sons, she should be informed of them. She, not they, would correct them. Sturgus and Butler replied that although they appreciated cooperation from parents, they believed firmly that some offenses "must be punished on the spot for the sake of discipline." Mrs. Ward did not disagree with them and she did not withdraw her sons from the school.<sup>12</sup>

During that visit to the Ward mansion, Matthews Ward met Sturgus for the first time. Out of his mother's hearing, Matt informed Sturgus that after learning of his younger brother's punishment he had intended to go to the school "to call and inflict person[al] violence" on Sturgus. He had decided not to go, however, when he learned that Sturgus was significantly older. Despite Matt's intimidating comments, Sturgus later stated that he "left no threatening message for him with Mrs. Ward." After the visit, however, Sturgus and Butler decided that they would dismiss the Ward boys the next time one of them misbehaved. Sturgus believed that William's behavior on November 1 presented a set of circumstances that led Butler to conclude that the infraction required immediate punishment. Because Mrs. Ward had already agreed that

such a situation might occur, the two men agreed that Butler would be allowed to serve as the boy's disciplinarian.<sup>14</sup>

Although they likely were not aware of it, Sturgus and Butler were not the first teachers to have difficulty with the Wards' sons. Several years earlier, when William was a pupil at Josiah Bliss' Louisville Collegiate Institute, he had received discipline from Bliss for telling a lie.<sup>15</sup> The next morning Matt Ward, whom Bliss had not previously met, arrived at the schoolroom with his younger brothers, William, Robert, and Victor. Matt asked to see Bliss outside the room. As the teacher started to walk towards the door, he noticed that

the younger brothers looked anxious and halted, asking Matt what he wanted. Matt asked why Bliss had whipped William the previous day. Still inside the schoolroom, Bliss asked Matt to step inside for his explanation. Instead, Matt called him a "d\_\_d rascal and coward" for not leaving the room. Bliss suspected that Matt was armed and tried to shut the door, but Matt placed his foot so that door at first could not be closed. When Bliss did succeed in shutting the door, he heard several kicks against the door as well as cursing before the Wards left.16



Moreover, prior to enrolling in the Louisville High School, a Professor Guentz had dismissed the younger Ward boys from yet another school, Shelby College. Following his brothers' departure from that school, Matt sent "a most violent letter" to the teacher despite his friends' advice to the contrary.<sup>17</sup>

n the morning that Matt Ward shot William Butler, Mr. and Mrs. Ward and their nineteen-year old son, Robert, had returned home about nine o'clock from a trip by steamboat to Cincinnati. Matt told his parents about Butler's punishment of William on the previous day. When Matt informed his father that he was going to the school to see Butler, his father offered to go because it was his responsibility as the parent to inquire into the disciplining of his son. According to his father's testimony at the murder trial, Matt insisted that he wanted to go to force Butler to offer "in the presence of the school, the apology that a gentleman ought to make." 18

Considering the past trouble between her son and Sturgus, Emily Ward urged Matt to take his brother, Robert, with him. That Robert was habitually armed

Shelby College, from which William Ward was dismissed prior to his enrollment at Louisville High School. Matthews Ward sent "a most violent letter" to William's teacher in response to the dismissal. The Filson Historical Society

with a bowie knife was a fact his mother would have known, but no one in the family knew that Matt was himself already armed. Indeed, earlier that same morning Matt had gone alone to a gun shop, where he bought two self-cocking pistols and requested that they be loaded before he left the store.<sup>19</sup>

About a half hour before the three Ward brothers arrived at the school, one of the Wards' slaves had gone to the school to collect the boys' books and escort the fourth son, Victor, back to the Ward home. At approximately ten o'clock the three brothers entered the main door of the schoolhouse. William went to the desk he usually occupied in the schoolroom and proceeded to argue with another boy while Matt requested that one of the students find and bring Mr. Butler to him. Butler was in the recitation room to the right of the entry, leading a mental arithmetic class, while Sturgus was in the one to the left, instructing an algebra class; each adjoined the main schoolroom by a single entrance.<sup>20</sup>

As soon as the student had summoned him, Butler came out to meet Matt. According to the boys who testified at the trial, their teacher greeted him courteously. Although the boys' accounts vary somewhat in the details, they generally agreed about what happened next. When Matt demanded to know what had happened on the previous day, Butler invited him into his recitation room for a private and confidential discussion. Matt refused to leave the schoolroom, insisting that their conference would take place in the room in which the teacher had humiliated his brother. Matt then demanded of Butler as to whether "the puppy who had the chestnuts and lied about them or the one who brought them was more contemptible." When Butler again refused to discuss the situation in the schoolroom, Matt called him "a d\_\_ d liar."<sup>21</sup>

itnesses disagreed about what happened next. Because the students were seated in different locations in the schoolroom, their views of the ensuing events varied. However, their testimony at the trial suggests that after Matt had insulted Butler, he struck the teacher. Butler responded by putting his right hand on Matt's left shoulder, possibly to push him out the open door behind him. Butler likely did not attempt to hit his assailant; indeed, he probably could not have done so, owing to the fact that his right hand had been crippled by a childhood burn and he could neither write with it nor close it into a fist.<sup>22</sup>

Simultaneous with Butler's movement towards him, Matt drew a pistol from his right coat pocket, where his hand had been since his arrival in the schoolhouse, and shot Butler in the chest. The end of the pistol caught momentarily in Butler's clothes until Butler himself pulled it out. As the fatally wounded teacher staggered towards Sturgus's recitation room, Matt pulled out a second gun and departed through the front door. Robert then drew his bowie knife and waved it at the boys and at Sturgus, who had emerged from his room. Sturgus immediately turned and fled back into his room where he

exited through the window, later stating that he had gone out that way to find a doctor. Robert departed but returned shortly to retrieve the murder weapon his brother had dropped.<sup>23</sup>

Once the Wards had left, several boys rushed to assist the fallen Butler, who wanted to be taken to his home. His strength ebbing, he could make it only a short distance down the street before collapsing. The boys carried Butler to the nearby home of John Hopkins Harney, publisher of the Louisville *Daily Democrat* and formerly a professor at Hanover who was related by marriage to Butler, where he was placed on the parlor floor.<sup>24</sup> A physician, Dr. D.D. Thompson, was the first to arrive on the scene, and as he examined the wound, Butler told him that he had been shot after being struck by Matt Ward. Thompson insisted later that Butler did not say that he struck Matt prior to being hit by him. Several other physicians who arrived a short time later claimed that Butler had indicated that he and Matt had clenched before he was shot.<sup>25</sup>

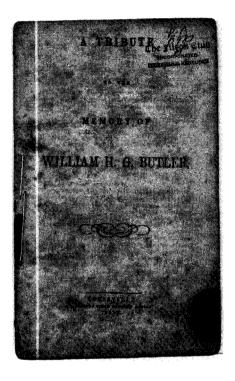
hortly after the shooting, the Louisville sheriff went to the Ward house to arrest Matt and Robert, who surrendered without resistance. Butler lingered near death for the remainder of the day; he died early on Thursday morning, November 3. Following his funeral, held at ten o'clock on Friday morning in Harney's home, was a procession to Cave Hill Cemetery, where the family buried Butler.<sup>26</sup>

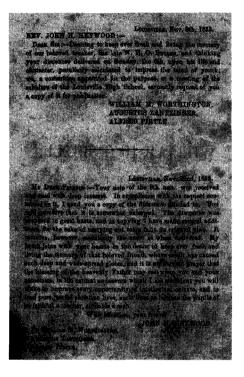
Prior to the funeral, the Board of Trustees and Teachers of the Private and Public Schools in Louisville met to draft resolutions responding to the death of their colleague William Butler. The proceedings, published in the local newspapers, noted that Butler's death "by the hand of violence [was] because of his faithful discharge of the duties of the profession to which his life was consecrated." Their resolutions further stated that "he fell a martyr to professional duty." The board members planned to have an address to honor Butler's professional life and services as well as have a monument erected over his grave. They agreed that the "professional teachers [would] wear the usual badge of mourning for the space of thirty days, and attend his funeral in a body." The Louisville High School students also participated in the funeral procession, which the *Daily Democrat* called "one of the largest funeral assemblages ever . . . in Louisville."<sup>27</sup>

On Monday, November 7, the students held a meeting and adopted their own resolutions, which sought contributions for the erection of the monument over the grave "of our gifted and exemplary teacher." They also requested that Rev. John Heywood of the city's Unitarian Church publish the sermon he had preached in honor of William Butler, who had been a member of the church, on the previous Sunday. Additionally the boys planned to wear mourning badges and wanted the "expression of our grief for our teacher published [by the Louisville newspaper editors] if they should think it right for boys and those

not yet grown to speak thus in print their love for him living and their grief for him dead." The local newspapers immediately published the resolutions and Heywood published his sermon as a booklet later that month.<sup>28</sup>

The Louisville High School continued after Butler's death. About two weeks after the tragedy, Sturgus advertised in local newspapers that he had hired one M. Piedfourck as a professor of French, mathematics, and linear drawing appropriate for mechanics and engineering. This new teacher had served previously as a university professor in Paris as well as the superintendent of





Cover of pamphlet, "A Tribute to the Memory of William H.G. Butler" by John Heywood, a printed copy of the letter from Butler's students written to Heywood about publishing his sermon, and Heywood's reply. The Filson Historical Society

indictment of the Ward brothers in December. The murder of a well-liked teacher by a wealthy aristocrat's son had outraged residents of all classes in Louisville. Fearing that it would be impossible to find an impartial jury there, the Wards' attorneys requested a change of venue for the trial. The judge agreed to move the trial from the Jefferson County Circuit Court in Louisville to the Hardin County Circuit Court in Elizabethtown. At the beginning of February, local authorities moved Matt and Robert to the Hardin County jail. The jailer partitioned its one room into two, one for Robert and one for Matt and his wife.<sup>30</sup>

Among the reasons that the defense offered for the change of venue was the collective behavior of the editors of the Louisville newspapers. In the months until the trial began in mid-April 1854, the three major daily papers published articles attacking each other's coverage of the murder and the subsequent public reaction. The *Louisville Journal*'s Whig editor, George Prentice, a friend of the Ward family, chose to give minimal coverage to the murder and to the police

public instruction for that city. Additionally they announced the Rev. Jacob Schenck as the German instructor. The partners also advertised bookkeeping as a new course the school would offer during the next quarter, and they limited the number of students to fifty, with only a few openings available.<sup>29</sup>

Public indignation did not subside after the funeral and the reopening of the school, continuing on even after the police court hearing and subsequent grand jury court testimony of witnesses in order to not create prejudice in the community and thus prevent a fair trial. Prentice's appearance as a character witness at Matt's trial would soon belie his claim of neutrality and led other newspaper editors to question his conduct as a publisher.<sup>31</sup>

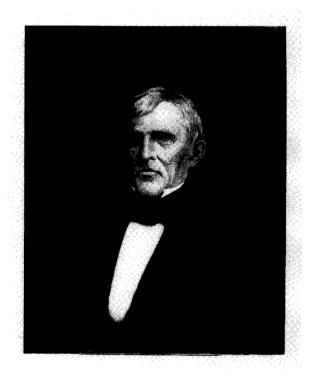
he editors of the Louisville Daily Democrat were as indisputably outraged by the murder as were the editors of the Louisville Daily Courier. Although these newspapers, like Prentice's, insisted that they intended to leave justice to the courts, they felt that the press bore responsibility for covering the news. Consequently they ran letters from citizens and articles from newspapers around the region that expressed dismay over the murder. Typical of the reprinted newspaper articles run by the Daily Democrat and Daily Courier was one from the Cincinnati Daily Columbian urging the press and people to see that "in Kentucky chivalry does not mean assassination; that honor of her gentlemen needs no vindication by acts, that ere now, have branded humbler men with the title of felon." In an unusual move, the trial judge, Jesse W. Kincheloe, claiming he wanted to prevent coverage that might impede a fair trial, instructed all reporters to refrain from publishing any testimony from the trial until it concluded. Nonetheless during the trial articles

appeared in the Louisville papers from correspondents who provided general descriptions of the trial.<sup>33</sup>

The nine-day trial began in Elizabethtown on Monday, April 18, 1854. The prosecution consisted of four attorneys, including several hired by the Butler family. In contrast, the defense team included eighteen attorneys, nine of whom were present for all or part of the trial. The most well-known member of the defense team was former U.S. Attorney General John J. Crittenden, whom the Kentucky legislature had elected to the U.S. Senate a few months earlier. Despite repeated requests from the Ward family and friends for his assistance, Crittenden had refused initially to be involved in defending Matt and Robert. In March, however, he relented and claimed that he volunteered his services rather than accept a fee because he was longtime friend of the Ward family. Many saw his nominal last minute involvement in the defense as a shameful attempt to influence jury members as to Matt Ward's innocence.34

The selection of the jury created significant controversy during and after the trial. Attorneys summoned a total of sixty-four men before finding or agreeing upon twelve self-proclaimed impartial jurors, whom the court then sequestered for the duration of the trial. Evidence produced after

John Jordan Crittenden, a U.S. senator from Kentucky and former attorney general, was a member of Ward's defense team. The Filson Historical Society



the trial suggests that several of the jurors had already made up their minds that Matt was not guilty before the trial started.<sup>35</sup> Although indicted together, Matt's trial preceded and was separate from that of his accomplice Robert, allowing defense counsel to include Robert's testimony in Matt's trial.

In his opening statement the judge instructed the jury to find Matt guilty or not guilty of manslaughter. If the jury concluded that he acted in self-defense, then the jury was to find him not guilty. Curiously, Kincheloe neglected to instruct it that conviction of murder was the third option. Only at the conclusion of the trial did the judge mention to the jury that murder was a possible reason for conviction, but even then he did not adequately explain the difference between manslaughter and murder. Principal witnesses were not present during the testimony of other witnesses, but character witnesses, including members of the Ward family and physicians who had attended the dying Butler, were allowed to be present throughout the duration of the trial. The prosecution witnesses included thirteen of the more than forty boys present in the schoolroom at the time Matt Ward shot Butler.<sup>36</sup>

Several of these boys had also given testimony at the police court inquiry immediately following the murder, and their testimony at the trial was the same as their earlier statements. The boys indicated that at no time was Matt in danger of being injured by Butler. None of the boys saw Butler strike Matt. Their testimony suggested that he may have either raised his arm to deflect a movement by Matt or to push Matt out the open door after Matt called him a liar. The boys agreed that Matt's right hand was in his coat pocket throughout the conversation with Butler until he pulled a pistol from that pocket. One of the boys who had been closest to Butler and the Wards had been afraid that there was going to be a physical confrontation and wanted to protect Butler. While he turned his back to pick up a set of fire tongs to use against Robert Ward, if necessary, Butler was shot.<sup>37</sup>

Ward's defense lawyers attempted to discredit these students' testimony, insinuating that their memories could not be trusted despite the fact that they were educated, articulate, and they came mostly from influential and prominent Louisville families. The several accounts of the trial provide fragments of demographic information that offer useful information about the ages and family backgrounds of the students attending the Louisville High School in 1853. The thirteen boys ranged in age from 13 to 18. Two were 13, one was 14, one was 15, two were 16, four were 17, and two were 18. Their fathers included a judge, a doctor, a merchant, a large landowner, a major, and a captain (probably of a steamboat). Only one of the thirteen was not currently a Louisville resident and boarded there to attend school. Crittenden went so far as to suggest that their teacher, Sturgus, had manipulated their recollections of events in the months since the murder.<sup>38</sup>

The Wards' attorneys insisted that the testimony of the teenage brother,

Robert, who was being tried as an accomplice and who would automatically receive acquittal if Matt were found to have acted in self-defense, was the only trustworthy account of what actually occurred between Butler and Ward in the schoolroom. Robert claimed that Butler struck his sickly brother prior to Matt's shooting him. Although Matt came to the trial on crutches, reputedly suffering from a rheumatic condition, on the day of the murder he had not used crutches.<sup>39</sup>

A drawing of the layout of the schoolroom with the two recitation rooms to the rear was submitted as evidence showing where the Wards, Butler, and each of witnesses who testified were located at the time of the murder. The left side of the schoolroom contained nine rows of four desks facing forward. Behind them was the door to Sturgus's recitation room. On the right side of the room there were only seven rows of four desks facing forward. In front of them was a long student bench facing the teachers' desk. At the rear of the right side of the room was the door to Butler's recitation room. There were two stoves in the room, one in the left front corner and one in the right rear corner. The main entrance to the schoolroom was reached by a short hallway between the two recitation rooms, each of which had a window facing the front yard. The schoolroom had windows only on the right side, and there was another exit door in the right front corner behind the teachers' desk.

The lengthy list of character witnesses included not only the Louisville mayor, politicians, ministers, and merchants but also mechanics and other members of the working class to show that men from a range of classes held Matt Ward in esteem. All insisted he had an amiable and gentle nature. Other witnesses supported the defense's position that it was customary for men, especially in cities, to carry concealed weapons for self-defense. Editor George Prentice testified that although it was not typical to carry concealed arms in Louisville, "young men anticipating a difficulty with a person of superior strength, would carry arms to protect themselves; not to commit murder, but to prevent disgrace." The defense used witness testimony suggesting that Matt had expressed a need for protection on the trip to his Arkansas plantation to be undertaken later in the week.

Some of the defense's testimony was clearly suspect. One of the most dubious witnesses and one whose testimony the public and newspapers would later ridicule was a carpenter named Barlow. He claimed to have been present at Col. Harney's shortly after the wounded Butler arrived and assisted the first doctor on the scene. However, that doctor was certain that Barlow was not present and did not assist him.<sup>43</sup> The defense used Barlow's testimony that Butler had told him he had struck Matt before Ward shot the teacher to prove self-defense. Despite his testimony at the trial, prosecution witnesses claimed

that on the day of the murder they heard Barlow say that if Matt Ward were not hanged, "then it was no use to try to hang a rich man's son in Louisville" and that prior to the trial, Barlow had gone uninvited to see Mr. Ward and offered to say that he had heard Butler state he had struck Matt first. He claimed under cross-examination that the Wards did not pay him for his testimony.<sup>44</sup>

Prentice gave additional testimony that he had seen Matt shortly after the murder and noticed a red mark under his left eye. He admitted he had not noticed it, however, until Matt had called his attention to it. When another witness said he remembered one of Matt's cheeks being redder than the other and probably caused by a blow, the prosecution asked if rubbing his face with a coarse towel might have had the same effect. Additional testimony specifying that Matt weighed 111 pounds was used to help establish Matt as a weakling who needed to carry two guns to confront an antagonist who outweighed him by twenty-five or thirty pounds, despite his having been an unarmed teacher with a crippled hand.<sup>45</sup>

On Wednesday afternoon, April 26, after nine full days (including Saturday) of testimony and lengthy defense and prosecution speeches, the trial ended. The following morning, the jury acquitted Matt Ward. This verdict automatically meant that Robert was acquitted as well. Residents of Louisville were outraged by the verdict. On Friday, notices appeared in some Louisville newspapers that an "indignation meeting" would convene on Saturday evening at the courthouse. Between eight and twelve thousand people showed up; most had to remain outside, while inside a group elected officers and developed resolutions condemning the verdict and planning a memorial to Butler. They brought out the resolutions and read them to the angry crowd, some of whom formulated more severe resolutions, including those demanding that Matt and Robert Ward leave town, that Crittenden resign as U.S. Senator, and that defense attorney Nathaniel Wolfe give up his seat representing Louisville in the state legislature.<sup>46</sup>

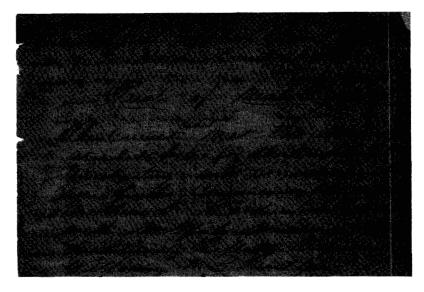
hat same evening another crowd gathered outside the Ward's empty mansion. Some of those present threw stones at the glass conservatory, causing significant damage to the building and the plants inside. Others hung effigies of the acquitted Ward brothers near the front of the house. Someone set the effigies on fire, and the mob threw them on the porch, causing the house to catch fire. A fire company managed to extinguish the blaze, but not before it had done some minor damage to the front of the house. Some of the crowd headed for Wolfe's house but were eventually persuaded by several prominent community members to turn back. Over the next few months groups of citizens in towns across Kentucky and in nearby states gathered to develop their own sets of resolutions condemning the trial and various of its participants. The resolutions of these indignation meetings were regularly published in the *Daily Courier* and *Daily Democrat*. Just as these newspa-

pers had information about the murder and the trial, they now covered the numerous local indignation meetings organized throughout Kentucky and nearby states to pass resolutions condemning the verdict of the jury in Matt Ward's trial.<sup>47</sup>

A fter the trial the newspapers published daily installments on the trial that included much of the actual testimony of the witnesses as well as the prosecuting and defense attorneys' speeches. George Cole, a reporter for the Cincinnati Gazette, was the source of the version of the trial that appeared in the Daily Democrat and the Daily Courier. The newspapers'

editors hired him prior to the trial and later published his version not only in their newspapers but also as a booklet which was sold all over the country.<sup>48</sup> Cole's articles provide the most complete version of the three existing eyewitness accounts of the trial.

The trial of the Louisville schoolman's murderer attracted more national attention than had the murder. Newspapers across the country carried the story. The nationally distributed *Monthly Law Reporter* published three articles in 1854 and 1855 analyzing the flawed trial. In

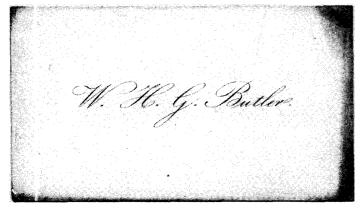


The first of sixty-one pages of testimony taken by James M. Lawson at the murder trial of Matthews F. Ward and a brief description of the principal participants. The Filson Historical Society

August 1854 at the annual meeting of the American Institute of Teachers in Providence, Rhode Island, its twelve hundred members adopted lengthy resolutions which included the declaration that Matt Ward was "guilty of an act of unparalleled atrocity." They further noted "that the practical assumption by any portion of society, of exemption from the claims of justice, or of superiority in honor or desert to those worthily engaged in a profession so indispensable and honorable as that of teaching, or in any other honest employment, is equally at war with truth and the public good."<sup>49</sup>

Matt Ward, too, commissioned a reporter to transcribe the trial. Yet A.D. Richardson's version, published in booklet form, omits most of the prosecution's concluding speeches. A third, unpublished eyewitness account exists. Twenty-one-year-old James M. Lawson, who later became a minister in the Louisville area, wrote out a long-hand version that remained with his family until his son donated it to The Filson Historical Society in 1929.<sup>50</sup>

The tragic events, including the trial and its aftermath, offer windows into the culture of antebellum Louisville. William Butler's image as a professional teacher appears to have been a respected one in the minds of those engaged in other middle-class careers in the city. Butler was esteemed for his intellectual achievements and entrepreneurship, but his moral character and that of other teachers earned him significant social status and respect. Complimenting Butler's writing style and knowledge of modern languages, his obituary in the Daily Democrat added that "It is principally his moral character that gave him his high standing in this place."51 Because Butler had taken his time to decide to become a professional teacher, a virtuous dimension involved itself in his decision-making. Rev. Heywood noted that Butler had chosen teaching in a school because he felt that was where he could do the most public good.<sup>52</sup> He based his decision on more than salary issues; after working as a tutor in the Ward home, he could have returned to that position and made just as much money as he could make teaching in his own school. However, working and living in the home of a wealthy family was not a career. The family would have regarded him as a subordinate, never as a peer. His position in the Ward household was closer to that of a servant which, in the



A calling card of William H.G. Butler. The Filson Historical Society

antebellum slave states, was synonymous with a black slave.

Butler's separation from the Ward household may have changed his social status in his own eyes and those of other professional men, but the Wards' view of his status as being lower than theirs appears not to have changed. The Wards regarded themselves as social superiors to professional teachers, as evidenced by Mrs. Ward's astonishment that Butler would punish a Ward and by her harsh language to Sturgus after he had disciplined

William for an earlier incident. Matt Ward's anger at Josiah Bliss, Minard Sturgus, and Professor Guentz for their earlier disciplining of William as well as his reaction to Butler's alleged insult to the Wards by disciplining William for breaking a school rule and lying also suggest that the Wards believed they required deference from lower status professional teachers.

In contrast to the Wards' perspective, Butler's behavior indicated he regarded himself as the Wards' peer, and even the superior of, the Ward boys whom their parents had placed in his care and under his authority as a schoolmaster. His role as a teacher allowed him to discipline even a Ward, and he was so unimpressed by the Wards' social status that he was ready to dismiss the Ward boys from school rather than put up with the family's attitude that held that they could act without consequences. Indeed, during the trial the Wards' attorneys attempted to denigrate Butler and teachers in general for

not knowing their place. One of the defense attorneys, Thomas F. Marshall, contemptuously referred to Butler as a "puissant pedagogue" despite the fact that Marshall's own father had been a master in a country school. The *Daily Democrat* called Marshall's description "monstrous presumption. What is a 'pedagogue' but a dog, whose chief delight should be to lick the feet of the master who beats him!" <sup>53</sup>

The defense attorneys argued that it was Butler who had misbehaved by not responding in an acceptable manner to Matt's requests. The lawyers implied that Butler was supposed to behave as a subordinate in the presence of a wealthy Ward, and if not, he violated the southern social code. Butler's refusal to apologize as Matt demanded was unacceptable. Prosecution attorney Gibson rebutted such contentions when he asked, "Was Butler a slave that Ward should address him in the language of a master?" 54

uring the summer after the trial, the *Daily Courier*'s editors repeatedly defended the valuable societal role of teachers and the character of Butler and Sturgus. In describing Butler's prompt attention to Matt's arrival at the school, the *Daily Courier* noted that "he came from duties as sacred as man can well fill." The newspaper then accused Crittenden of slandering Sturgus and insulting Butler by saying during the trial that Butler's stiff behavior towards Matt was a result of Sturgus's influence and proclaimed that Sturgus's "duties are fully as useful to the country as any that are rendered by Mr. Crittenden." 55

This antebellum tragedy demonstrates the conflicting views of the social status of professional teachers held by wealthy, southern land-owning gentry and those held by urban professional teachers. Displaying an egalitarian and professionally courteous manner to everyone, Butler did not acknowledge wealthy families as patrons deserving of deference. As a teacher, he had authority over his schoolroom; he did not work for the Wards. Indeed, one source of Matt's anger toward Butler appears to be the Wards' belief that a former employee could not be a peer, much less a superior to a Ward. Matt's earlier treatment of Bliss, which foreshadowed his confrontation with Butler, suggests that he felt driven to impress upon middle-class men with intellectual achievements arguably equal with his own that aristocracy, not meritocracy, determined social status in Louisville. Matt was determined to enforce adherence to a social hierarchy which put his family at the pinnacle. His reaction to Butler and the other teachers suggests that he thought that the Wards' social position needed reinforcement against the threats to it posed by the teachers' lack of deference.

Although self-proclaimed aristocrats such as the slave owning Wards regarded themselves as superior to teachers and others in the professional middle class, the public outrage expressed in the resolutions passed in indignation meetings following the acquittal demonstrates that a significant number of

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citizens believed differently. Being a gentleman required more than wealth and self-regard. An article in the *Daily Democrat* lamented the behavior of those who thought they can make others regard them as gentlemen just by demanding that they be treated as such.<sup>56</sup> Gentlemen were to demonstrate the behavior of gentlemen, and being a gentleman in Kentucky was not the prerogative of a specific social class. Only behavior, not wealth or slaveholding, could determine whether a man was a gentleman; others were merely ruffians, those of the Jacksonian mob.

Although Butler's northern, egalitarian values and his professionalism as a self-made man clashed with the Wards' southern, aristocratic values that required others to recognize their superior social status, Butler and the Wards shared a similar understanding of the need for a gentleman to maintain his personal honor or experience degradation in the eyes of society. The southern culture of honor was an integral part of the aristocratic perspective of white slaveholders, but all those who wished to be regarded as gentlemen in southern society were affected by it. Central to this perspective was the importance of outward appearances. A man's, indeed a family's, reputation was based on others' acceptance of the man he projected himself to be. The opinions of others determined one's social status and the status of one's family. In such a culture, statesmen received the highest esteem while intellectuals whose activity involved investigation of hidden reality were accorded lesser significance.<sup>57</sup>

But Ward which soon manifested itself in his own denunciation of the teacher as a "d\_\_\_ned liar." Because the culture of honor was based on appearances, calling a man a liar was to question whom he claimed to be. Men of honor distinguished themselves from slaves, whom they regarded as constant liars, by never permitting themselves to be called liars without insisting on an apology or a duel. Being called a coward was similar to being called a liar because the accused was regarded as different from the person he projected himself to be; it cast a shadow on the entire family. In contrast a northern culture of dignity was based on the equal value of individuals. The development of the individual was linked to the growth of capitalism and appreciation for law and self-restraint. Progress was regarded positively in this culture. There was no attempt to hold onto the past or to status linked to traditions. In this culture an insult might lead to an insult in reply but not to a sense of blemished honor and need for reparation. 58

Honor played an indisputable role in this tragedy. William perceived himself and his family as being insulted when Butler whipped him for being a liar. Even though he was a schoolboy entrusted to the care and authority of Butler by his parents, he thought that Butler had humiliated him publicly. Matt insisted that only an apology from Butler would remove this stain from William's and the Ward family's honor. That the Ward family never considered

the possibility that William told or could tell an inaccurate version of events to his family although that is very likely what occurred given William's history of untruths. For Matt the issue was not whether William was a liar but that he had been publicly portrayed, even punished, as being a liar. Matt went to the schoolhouse not for an explanation, but an apology. Matt intended to degrade Butler in his schoolroom in front of his students just as he believed Butler had degraded his brother the previous day.<sup>59</sup>

imilarly, Butler could neither give an apology for something he did not do nor ignore the epithets Matt Ward hurled at him after his refusal to apologize. The code of honor did not allow either man to just walk away from that confrontation without his reputation being tarnished. The honor code trumped Butler's professionalism and personal pacifism and required a response. Matt likely knew exactly the dilemma he had created for Butler and was armed to defend himself should Butler react as Matt thought the honor code predicted he would have to act. Although Butler was obviously offended by Matt's insults, he did not strike Matt despite the verbal provocation and his trespassing uninvited in Butler's schoolhouse, instead attempting to push Matt out of his schoolroom and off his property through the open door immediately behind Matt when Matt shot him. The code of honor itself contradicted the defense attorneys' assertions that Matt shot Butler in self-defense, much less the physical limitations that likely precluded Butler from acting aggressively toward his assailant. Butler, not Matt, had received the insult and acted honorably by attempting non-violently to push his offender off of his property rather than attack him. The lack of any record of a statement of remorse by Matt either before or after the trial for the murder of the defenseless man whom even Matt had called a gentleman and whom his family had admired suggests that Matt did not view his behavior as requiring apology. He and his family were the victims. According to his view of the honor code, his visit to the school and the subsequent events were justified by Butler's insulting treatment of his family.

The Ward family's view of their superiority over a teacher was apparently not shared by the other students under Butler's authority. Even George Prentice's Louisville Journal noted on the day of Butler's funeral that he "was universally esteemed and beloved wherever he was known, and was the idol of his pupils." The other boy who was punished for eating chestnuts provided by William did not complain about his whipping nor did he think it was severe. One of the students who witnessed the Wards' arrival and adversarial behavior towards Butler turned to reach for a tongs by the stove so that he could protect his teacher if necessary. After Butler was shot, several boys carried him down the street to Col. Harney's house. After Butler's death the students held a meeting to write resolutions, expressing their respect for Butler. They requested that their resolutions be published in the local newspapers so that the community

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could see how much they respected their teacher and how saddened they were by his murder. They marched as a group in the funeral procession. They requested that Rev. Heywood publish his sermon eulogizing Butler so that they and other members of the public could have copies. They contributed to the monument that the citizens had immediately decided to erect over Butler's grave at their own expense. The positive rapport that existed between Butler and his students may not have been typical. An editorial in the *Daily Courier* printed at the beginning of the 1854 fall term lamented that "one of the besetting sins of Western schools is the irreverence which pupils feel for their teachers; and we grieve to say the feeling is too often encouraged at home." 61

he teacher's role was *in loco parentis* as long as the students were under his authority in the schoolroom. If the family deemed communication with the teacher to be necessary, it was the father's responsibility to speak with the teacher.<sup>62</sup> Matt usurped his father's authority by going to the school and confronting Butler. Butler did not have to give any information to a student's older brother. Matt's expectation that he could be a surrogate for his father would not have been shared by schoolmasters. Butler's prompt and courteous attention to Matt's arrival was probably attributable more to Butler's personal friendship with the Ward family than a requirement of his professional role as a teacher. When Mrs. Ward had summoned Butler and Sturgus to the Ward home, they went as requested. However, there was a limit to the parents' control over a student once entrusted to a schoolmaster. Although Mrs. Ward had tried to insist that only William's parents should be responsible for disciplining him, Butler and Sturgus refused to agree because there were times when a teacher had to take immediate action in the classroom.

The fragments of evidence provided by the students in the trial testimony suggest that they attended a well-run school.<sup>63</sup> When the Wards arrived looking for Butler, one of the boys went to summon him while the others, as required by the school's behavior policy, continued to work at their desks without turning around to observe the visitors. While Sturgus and Butler were in their respective recitation rooms, the boys in the schoolroom worked without supervision.

Trial testimony suggests that the teachers in the Louisville High School had rules for student behavior and enforced them consistently and fairly. Butler investigated the chestnut incident before punishing the guilty boys. Butler showed his trust in his students by believing their accounts of their own guilt as well as of William's. He also verified their stories with the shells under their desks. William's history of prevarication apparently made him less than credible about his own lack of guilt. Butler based his punishment on the evidence before him rather than William's plea of innocence. However, when one of the chestnut eaters said he had not known his action was contrary to school rules since he had only been there two months, Butler did not punish him. This lack

of knowledge of the rules after two months of attendance seems somewhat surprising, but Butler's complacent reaction to it suggests that rules were not posted or given to new students. Possibly he had announced them at the beginning of the term and had not routinely shared them with students who arrived later in the term. Perhaps the arrival of students after the beginning of

the term was itself so rare in this private school that its leaders had developed no procedure for informing late arrivals of the rules.

The prosecution argued that William Ward "was punished for a violation, not only of the rules of the school, but of morality and honesty . . . it was the duty of his teacher to correct him, and had he failed, he would have been highly culpable." The boys expected to be punished by whipping when they violated a rule. On the afternoon of November 1, Butler told Sturgus that the situation's "peculiar circumstances" had caused him to whip William rather than immediately dismiss him. Despite Butler's use of light strapping, all such corporal punishment had become a controversial practice in American schools by the 1850s. By then the use of a short leather strap had replaced caning. As Nathaniel Wolfe, one of the defense attorneys, announced,

I deny the right of a teacher to whip a child. The parent imparts to the teacher some of his authority, but not that authority... I have two beautiful and talented boys as any in Kentucky, and I have told their teachers never to correct them... [W]hipping is not allowed in our colleges, and has been abolished in our navy. It is inconsistent with a spirit of boldness and bravery. It is condemned by the sentiment of the age.<sup>64</sup>

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efense attorney Marshall also attacked Butler's approach to discipline. "The school-teacher has something of the parent's power, and ought to have a parent's love. William Ward is fifteen years old. If a father detected a son of that age in a falsehood, would he have proclaimed it publicly, and whipped his boy in public like a dog? He would do it privately and with a parent's tenderness." <sup>65</sup>

Prosecuting attorney Alfred Allen countered Marshall's view by arguing that whipping was not only appropriate but necessary. His own experience with being whipped as a schoolboy had been beneficial in improving his conduct and had in no way harmed him. Indeed, a *New York Herald* editorial, reprinted

The title page of a published report of the testimony on the trial of Matthews F. Ward, which included several defense and prosecuting speeches. Reported by A.D. Richardson and certified by Thomas D. Brown, Clerk of Hardin County Circuit Court, published in 1854. The Filson Historical Society

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in the *Daily Courier* in February 1854, referred to the practice of whipping schoolboys as "flogging" and described it as a "barbarous practice" which had already passed from favor in Europe. France had actually abolished flogging, recommending "moral suasion" as the appropriate substitute.<sup>66</sup>

Yet the realities of the academy classroom made others believe that alternatives to "moral suasion" were necessary. In November 1853 the *Daily Courier* reprinted an editorial from the *Cincinnati Commercial* that hoped "filial affection . . . a regard for their nearest relatives, the pleasure of a good conscience and the advantage of a good name, will operate sufficiently to" cause students to maintain classroom discipline, nevertheless "the difficulties of governing a large school of boys from families of high social position and fashionable connections, are greatly increased by the vanity and inconsiderateness" instilled in them by families who believed they have no superiors.<sup>67</sup>

In order to enforce good manners and morals among "a crowd of schoolboys," antebellum schools needed stringent regulations and punishments. The parents' focus as well as the boys' should be on the misbehavior that led to the punishment, not the fact that he was punished. "His fortune, interest, and advancements in life, will be promoted by that severe training which will effectually repress every evil disposition. Such a desirable result cannot be reached by any false indulgence and specious liberality. Those who have seen most of boys and public schools will agree most heartily to the above desultory hints." 68

In the antebellum South, however, punishment by whipping carried an additional stigma from that attached in the North. Whipping was the punishment for an unruly slave. When Butler used a leather strap on William, he was treating a son of a slave owner the way his father's slaves might be treated. Once again a clash in cultures may have played a significant role in causing the subsequent tragedy. Butler, as the product of a non-slave owning family in Indiana, might not have given whipping the same connotation as did the owners of slaves.

his tragic episode demonstrates how class and political conflicts could affect antebellum schooling as well as its educators. The antebellum obsession with honor only intensified the collision between Butler as representative of the northern, non-slave owning well-educated professional middle class and Ward as representative of the southern, slaveholding aristocracy. This conflict and its sad outcome provide a rare opportunity to examine classroom management as well as student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships in a private secondary school in a significant urban center. This historical episode offers insight about how differing views of the role of the professional teacher were embedded in broader socioeconomic issues. Yet the incident also reveals both change and continuity in the southern cultural norms amid the changing landscape of urban, antebellum Kentucky, as the

violent response of outraged Louisvillians suggests. That the Wards could at once escape legal punishment for their crime then suffer the recriminations of the broader city populace regardless of their place in it suggests a changing society in a changing region, one that both southern and northern cultures influenced.

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