



Charles Nutter
Newspaper Reporter

Bio & Character Sketch of Charles P. Nutter

1903 – 1987

Age in April, 1923: 20 Age at Death: 84

Age when picture was taken: (est) 20

Charles P. Nutter was born in Nebraska in 1903. After completing his initial education, he pursued a degree in Journalism at the University of Missouri in Columbia. His family was unwilling to pay for his education, so at sixteen, Nutter moved to Columbia on his own and worked for two years to save the tuition he needed to enroll.

At the time of the Scott lynching, Nutter was working part time as a stringer for The Evening Missourian newspaper.



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The Scott lynching was very likely the biggest story that Charles Nutter covered up to that point in his young life, but he would go on to a long and very rewarding career in journalism, likely spurred by the courage and steadfastness he displayed in Columbia while covering the Scott story and then taking the witness stand to testify against George Barkwell amidst many who wanted to quell his testimony. That he was run out of town immediately after the trial later proved to be his “badge of honor.”

Even in his years in Moscow, Russia, covering the Stalin regime as the Chief of the AP Bureau, it is very likely that the bravery he displayed in Columbia was a necessary component of the job.

Nutter’s hard work, evidenced by his desire to do whatever he could to “earn” his tuition at Missouri, carried him and his family – including the kids! – through the early lean years when he operated small town newspapers and did whatever was necessary to keep them operational.

Perhaps the most important skill that Nutter displayed in mid-1923 was his ability to honestly report what he saw, without favoritism or malice, and certainly without influence from outside parties or even regard for his own well-being. He may not have risked his life to gather the news, or even to report it in the newspaper, but he certainly did risk bodily injury or worse when he testified at trial.

Throughout everything, this young, hard-working, ethical, sincere and honest young man exhibited the very best of his trade – in stark contrast to the much older Ed Watson and Hollis Edwards at the Daily Tribune.



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SIDE

135

Charlie Nutter takes the stand.

NUTTER

My name is Charles Nutter. I'm a Junior at the University and a reporter for the Daily Missourian.

HULEN

What did you see and hear on Stewart Bridge in the early morning of April 29th?

NUTTER

I was standing in front of Frank Misselwitz, right next to Scott. I talked with him and pleaded with the crowd. Mr. Scott was calm. He protested his innocence coolly. He told us it was Ollie Watson—a negro confined in the same cell—who committed the crime. Watson had confessed it to him that very afternoon. Then he prayed. His prayer moved me deeply. It was the outpouring of an absolutely innocent spirit.

NUTTER

I looked down and saw Mr. Scott's body clear of the ground, then I hurried away.

HULEN

How close were you to Mr. Barkwell?

NUTTER

Right up against him. To reach Scott, Barkwell shoved me back into Misselwitz's chest.

HULEN

Thank you, Mr. Nutter, for that courageous testimony.

Nothing further. Jurors and gallery spectators exchange glances and whisper.

GANTT

Does the Defense wish to cross examine?

Congressman Major stands.

SIDE

MAJOR

Yes, your honor.

The tall Congressman walks toward the jury box and stares down at Nutter before asking his first question.

MAJOR

Did you even know George Barkwell's name before the evening of the lynching?

NUTTER

No, sir.

The Congressman addresses the jury more often than the witness as he continues.

MAJOR

Could you describe the clothing the man carrying the rope wore that night?

NUTTER

No, sir.

MAJOR

If it was too dark to see his clothing, how can you be confident about his identity?

NUTTER

It wasn't too dark. The moonlight and arclight made everything clear. I'd already seen Barkwell's face at the jail and heard him called George. When I saw the same face at the bridge, I heard someone call him Barkwell, so I turned to another man and double-checked both names. As for the clothes—he was in shirtsleeves, but I didn't study them closely because it didn't seem necessary.

Major walks to the witness stand and stares down at Nutter.

MAJOR

If you were so certain George Barkwell hanged Mr. Scott, why didn't you report that in your newspaper story? Wouldn't that have been important?

SIDE

NUTTER

Barkwell might have sued the paper for libel.

MAJOR

Truth is an absolute defense in libel cases. A truthful reporter should have nothing to fear.

NUTTER

Perhaps, but naming names in this kind of story just isn't done. It would smack of frontier justice.

MAJOR

Why didn't you give Barkwell's name to police the night of the lynching instead of waiting for the grand jury?

NUTTER

I did report it that night. I told officer Plez King when I saw him in front of Boone Tavern.

MAJOR Nothing further your honor.

As the Congressman returns to the defense table, Hulen stands.

HULEN

The prosecution rests.

GANTT

Let's break for lunch. This court will be in recess until one o'clock.