

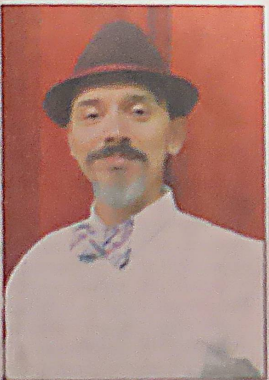
Playwright: 'Was justice served in Lawrence County?'

Editor's note: This is the eighth in a series of stories about "The Hanging: The Saga of Betsey Reed," a joint effort between the Lawrence County Historical Society and the Lawrence County Arts Council that will take place in the Lawrenceville High School auditorium, today through Sunday and Nov. 2-4.

Bill Richardson
Daily Record

LAWRENCEVILLE
— Was justice served in a Lawrence County courtroom in 1845?

That's what playwright Dann M. Norton wants audience members to be asking themselves starting tonight, as they walk away



**DANN
NORTON**

after watching his three-act, "The Hanging: The Saga of Betsey Reed."

Reed was accused of

murdering her husband, Leonard, via arsenic poisoning in Crawford County. A change of venue brought the case to Lawrence County where she was tried, convicted and on May 23, 1845, hanged by the neck near the Embarras River.

"There are definitely some questions, which make you wonder," said Norton, a native of Rushville, Illinois, who since 1994 has been a teacher for Unit 20 schools. "I don't know that if she were tried today, if the outcome would be any different. Because even today, we sometimes struggle with people being accused of something before there

any evidence in the matter."

Reed was tried and convicted by a 12-person jury, all men. At the insistence of her attorney, public defender Usher Ferguson Linder, she was not allowed to speak at her trial, and did not call any witnesses.

"I'm not sure anything would be different," said Norton, who lives in Vincennes with his wife, Amy, and young son, Paschal. "But at least I hope (this play) would make people think about it."

While his job as a playwright is finished, Norton has what he calls "a cameo" during the performance. While sets are being

changed behind closed curtains, Norton will be under a spotlight, delivering the words of Crawford County State's Attorney A. Kitchell.

"I present what the state's attorney at the time actually wrote down, verbatim, at the courthouse," he said. "It's an important document that I didn't want lost, that I wanted to be placed in the play somehow, and it works out really great because during that time, sets can be changed while I'm doing my small part."

Otherwise, Norton is simply "sitting back and watching it come to life." Rehearsals have been under way for a few weeks, and a complete

dress rehearsal took place Thursday evening.

"I have to say, as I've sat back during rehearsals I've been really surprised that what I wrote on paper, people have understood it and presented it the way I saw it in my mind. They're doing a great job."

The play will be performed this evening and Saturday at 7 p.m. and Sunday afternoon at 2 p.m., in the Lawrenceville High School auditorium. There will be three more performances next weekend.

Tickets will be available at the door for \$10. Seniors and students will receive a discount, and will be admitted for \$8.