



# Murder in Their Hearts: A Story of the Fall Creek Massacre

*David Thomas Murphy*

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In March of 1824 a group of angry and intoxicated settlers brutally murdered nine Indians camped along a tributary of Fall Creek. The carnage was recounted in lurid detail in the contemporary press and the events that followed sparked a national sensation. Although violence between settlers and Native Americans was not unusual in the Old Northwest Territory during the early nineteenth century, in this particular incident the white men responsible for the murders were singled out and hunted down, brought to trial, convicted by a jury of their neighbors, and, for the first time under American law, sentenced to death and executed for the murder of Native Americans. In the aftermath of the slayings, federal and state authorities perhaps motivated more by the encouragement of economic growth and the preservation of regional security than a commitment to justice for the victims, nevertheless, were determined to maintain the fragile peace of interracial coexistence. Their success in doing so proved to be local, temporary, and imperfect.

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