

# Frankie Silver

On July 12, 1833, Frances “Frankie” Silver was hanged from the gallows on Damon’s Hill in Morganton. She had been convicted of killing her husband Charlie with an axe and hacking his body into pieces. The murder occurred three days before Christmas in 1831.

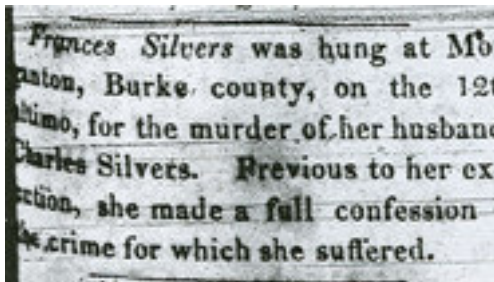
At first Frankie said that Charlie had left home to go hunting across the Toe River. But when he didn’t return for Christmas, his family suspected foul play. On December 26 they organized a search party. Men from the community scoured the steep slopes and icy riverbanks. Charlie’s father even hired a conjurer to locate his son. But no sign of the fair-haired young man could be found.

Then a neighbor named Jake Cullis, a hunter and trapper, found pieces of bones and human teeth among the ashes in the fireplace inside the Silvers’ cabin near Kona, Mitchell County. More body parts were discovered beneath the cabin’s floorboards, buried in the yard, and hidden in a nearby sourwood stump. In January 1832 Frankie was arrested for first-degree murder. Two months later, a jury indicted her.

Little hard evidence was presented during the two-day trial in Morganton in March. But the jury found Frankie guilty, and the judge sentenced her “to be hung by the neck until she be dead.” She was eighteen years old and the mother of an infant daughter.

Frankie’s lawyers filed several appeals, and nearly three dozen important Morganton women asked the governor to show mercy when it appeared that Frankie had murdered Charlie in self-defense. But one by one the appeals were denied. In a frantic effort to save Frankie, her family broke her out of jail. A sheriff’s posse captured her within hours. At the 1833 spring session of court in Morganton, Frankie’s execution date was set for July

12. The day of her hanging was pleasant and sunny.



*Newspaper report from the Raleigh Star and North Carolina Gazette, August 2, 1833*

Stories of the gruesome crime are still passed around today, partly because of a poem of confession that Frankie supposedly wrote in jail and recited at her hanging. The poem gave jealousy as Frankie’s motive, but some people think it was Charlie’s drunken abuse and beatings that drove her to kill him. And gossip still swirls over whether Frankie, a pretty, petite blonde, had help

committing the murder or covering it up.

Because the law in those days didn’t allow women to testify in court, Frankie never told her story before a judge. Even at the gallows, when she started to speak her last words, Frankie’s father shouted to her from the crowd, “Die with it in you, Frankie!” Sadly, she did.

Until 1952 Frankie Silver's remains lay in an unmarked grave behind the Buckhorn Tavern near Morganton on what is now private property. A small granite headstone marks the supposed site of her burial.

Charlie Silver was buried in three graves in the Silver family cemetery behind the Kona Baptist Church. That's because the pieces of his body weren't found all at once, and it was considered improper to reopen a grave.