

The Murder of Henry Stuessy - Part 1

We have seen incidents of accidental shootings in past columns. Most of those were simply accidents, but the following incident that took place just south of New Glarus in November 1882 is nothing like that. It has enough twists to make it interesting. This information was reported in both the Monroe Sun and the Monroe Sentinel. One can only imagine the shock when people in Monroe read of this horrific event a few days after it happened.

The Sun first reported on Tuesday (the seventh) that Henry Stuessy, a farmer who lived along the Monticello Road was found in a timber on Monday with a bullet through his head. He and his hired man had left home on Sunday to visit some neighbors. As was probably common in those days, they took a rifle along with them to shoot game. The hired man returned alone that evening, said he didn't feel well and that Stuessy would return shortly, then went to bed. Stuessy did not return home that night, so a search was made on Monday. Various theories of how the incident had happened were circulating, but nothing definite was known at the time.

The Sentinel reported on Wednesday that the two bullet holes were made by the rifle which the hired man had when they started away. Sheriff Studley and the District Attorney went to New Glarus to investigate the matter. An inquest was held.

By the following week more information was shared. The Sun stated that Stuessy had owned a farm and his body "was found on Monday morning within 80-rods of his house lying stone dead, with the ghastly bullet holes clean through his head to show the manner of his taking-off. The theory of suicide being clearly untenable, suspicion was strongly directed toward the hired man named Burkhard Brahm, as he was last in the murdered man's company, and his intimacy with the dead man's wife, which was freely talked about by the neighbors, supplies a motive for committing the horrid deed." Stuessy was found lying on his gun and three squirrels. Brahm was arrested on suspicion, taken to Monroe, and placed in jail.

The Sun updated with the following from the same paper. District Attorney Clawson interviewed the murdered man's wife and used his powers of persuasion to such an effect that she broke down completely and "made a clean breast of the horrid affair." She told how she and Brahm had plotted not only to put her husband out of the way, but her six children, also, by dosing them with strychnine, which she had already procured. She told how the hired man had shot her husband, came into the house, and then fearing lest the first shot wasn't effectual, went and shot him again, came back, went to bed and slept till morning. The recital of the minutia of this bloody affair by this guilty woman is enough to blanch the stoutest cheek with horror. Brahm, when told that his "wretched paramour" had revealed everything, also broke down and made a full confession.

The Sentinel was written four days later, so the writers had that many more days to gather information. Mrs. Stuessy had promised to marry Brahm. They had tried to kill Mr. Stuessy on two other occasions, once with chloroform procured by Brahm and administered by her; she secured strychnine for the second attempt. Having failed at both of these attempts, she insisted that Brahm shoot her husband. Brahm had purchased a rifle eight days before the murder.

The day after the murder, Brahm and Mrs. Stuessy sent the ten-year-old son to the neighbors to see if they had seen Stuessy. The neighbors formed a search party; Brahm was with them when the body was found. The Stuessys had six small children, the previously mentioned son being the eldest. Mrs. Stuessy denied that she was in any way implicated in the murder.

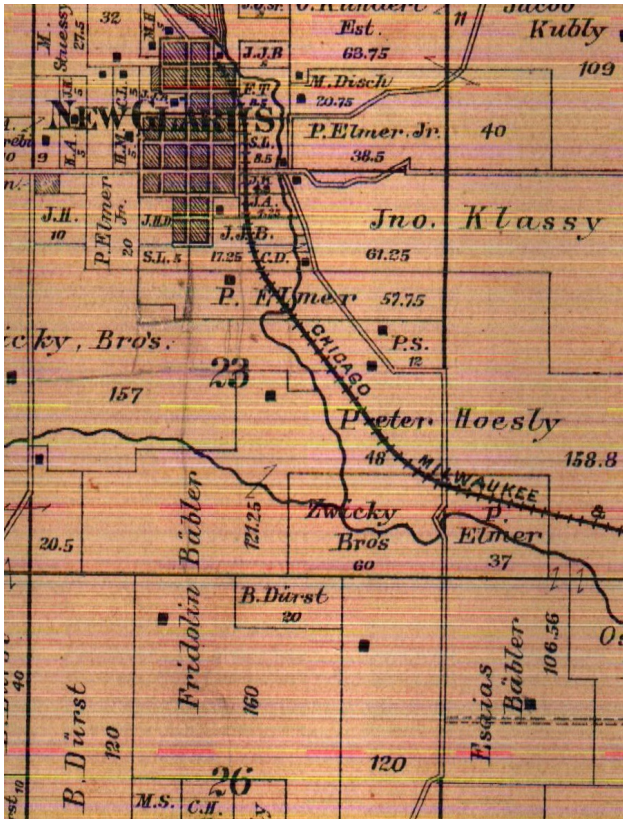
The community was greatly shocked and excited about this terrible tragedy; lynching had been threatened. Mr. Stuessy was about 32 years old and Brahm's only 22.

A notice was also printed in the Sentinel on the 15th that there would be a public sale on the 21st at the Stuessy farm, two miles south of the village, with Luchsinger as the auctioneer. The personal property included three horses, 17 cows, young cattle, hogs, chickens, farm implements, furniture, and more.

Administrator Jacob Freitag sold the Stuessy farm to Elias Babler for \$1,575.00. A small portion of the farm was southwest of the creek in the southwest corner of Section 24. A larger portion of the farm was near the northwest corner of Section 25.

An article in the December 20 Sentinel editorialized that the case of Mrs. Stuessy was a particularly hard one. "Not for her alone - for personally she is probably as well off as could be expected. But she is the mother of six small children, the youngest about a year and a half old. To be separated from their mother, for whom they ask daily and cry often, is indeed a great pity. Her youngest cried so often and refused to be comforted, that the authorities finally permitted the friends to bring the baby to her. She has comfortable quarters in the jail [the building that now houses the Jailhouse Tap], in the female ward, and her child is perfectly happy. We understand that Mrs. Stuessy expects to soon become the mother of one more. 'Verily, how the innocent must suffer with the guilty.' As to the extent of the woman's guilt, and how far she was responsible for the tragedy enacted so near her home, the court and jury will determine in due course of time. But may God have mercy on the poor helpless children that are born in such wedlock."

There will be more about the trials and some twists in this story next week.



The murder of Henry Stuessy took place in the woods on his farm just south of New Glarus in November 1882. The farm, in the lower right corner of this scan of the 1891 Green County plat book, was still owned by Elias Babler. The farm was located along what is now Edelweiss Road, just east of Valley View Road.