

The Murder of Henry Stuessy - Part 2

The trial of Burkhard Brahm for the murder of Henry Stuessy on November 5, 1882 came to a close on March 16, 1883. A. S. Douglas was appointed to defend Brahm and District Attorney Clawson was the prosecutor, assisted by R. D. Evans. Evans opened the argument with a short and able speech of 30 minutes. The Sentinel reported, "Mr. Douglas summed up the case for the defense, and P. J. Clawson closed the argument for the prosecution, who left no peg upon which to hang a doubt of the guilt of Brahm, who committed a cold-blooded, deliberate murder. The jury were out for only 20 minutes when they returned and rendered the verdict. The trial of Mrs. Stuessy for being an accessory to the crime of murder had been postponed until November, on account of her delicate situation.

The Sun added that the court room [in the old Courthouse] "was crowded to suffocation on the whole time the trial was in progress, a great many ladies unable to repress the morbid curiosity they feel in one who has imbued his hands with human blood, graced the trial with their presence and almost upset the equanimity of one of the lawyers by fixing their eyes on him too closely when he got up to make his plea. A jury of more than ordinary, intelligent 'twelve good men and true' was secured to try the case."

The Sun concluded, "On Tuesday the convicted prisoner was brought into the court and sentenced to imprisonment at Waupun at hard labor for life. Two days of each year, one being the anniversary of the bloody deed, to be passed in darkness. During the whole trial Brahm sat as if half stupified, with his head bowed, and did not appear to realize his awful position. He is twenty-two years of age. His face, though not remarkable for its intelligent appearance, has nothing to show him capable of so horrible a crime. His head is small and looks as if there was not enough in it to create much of a stir in the world. His was, barring a dull, stupid look, perfectly calm and self-possessed, and was innocence, almost, itself."

Mrs. Stuessy gave birth to a 10-pound son in the county jail on Monday, May 7. The Sentinel commented, "It never ought to be permitted. The law has no right to place such a stigma upon the new born. It is the first instance of the kind that has ever occurred in Green County, and we presume the state." The Sun printed, "Poor, innocent little waif! Far better would it have been for him if he had never opened his eyes in the world than to live under so terrible a stigma. Born in prison of a murderess! What a heritage of sin, sorrow and shame to begin life with."

Sheriff Ruegger made a trip to Waupun on Monday, October 8 to get Brahm, who was to be a witness in Mrs. Stuessy's trial the following week. A special venire for 75 jurymen was issued from the Circuit Court on Thursday, October 18. The jurymen were on hand, but Mrs. Stuessy was taken violently ill. After a medical examination, it was ascertained that she was too ill to appear for trial. Judge Bennett dismissed the jury and closed the term of court.

The murder trial was called again on Monday, March 10, 1884. Out of the regular term jury, ten qualified jurors were secured. A special venire for 75 was again issued. The Sheriff was instructed to summon them from localities as remote from the scene of the crime as possible. Brahm, "the alleged accomplice and paramour," had again been brought from Waupun the previous week to be used as a witness for the prosecution.

One of the jurors was taken ill with the measles on Saturday, the 15th, which caused the trial to be postponed again. The case had just gotten under way with the defense setting up the plea of insanity for Mrs. Stuessy. The 12 jurymen attended the Universalist Church service in a body on Sunday, the 23rd.

The trial, which was only about ten hours from completion, was again interrupted on Tuesday, March 25 when the juror, Mr. Welton, was thought to be dangerously ill with a relapse of the measles. The judge ordered the panel to be held and properly guarded until the case would continue on Monday, March 31.

Mrs. Stuessy was finally found guilty on April 3 as an accessory of the murder of her husband. The Sentinel reported, "The prosecution was ably conducted by District Attorney P. J. Clawson, assisted by A. S. Douglas; the defense was stubbornly maintained by Messrs. Colin Wright, assisted by Judge Dunwiddie and Gen'l Alex Wilson of Iowa County." The jury of 12

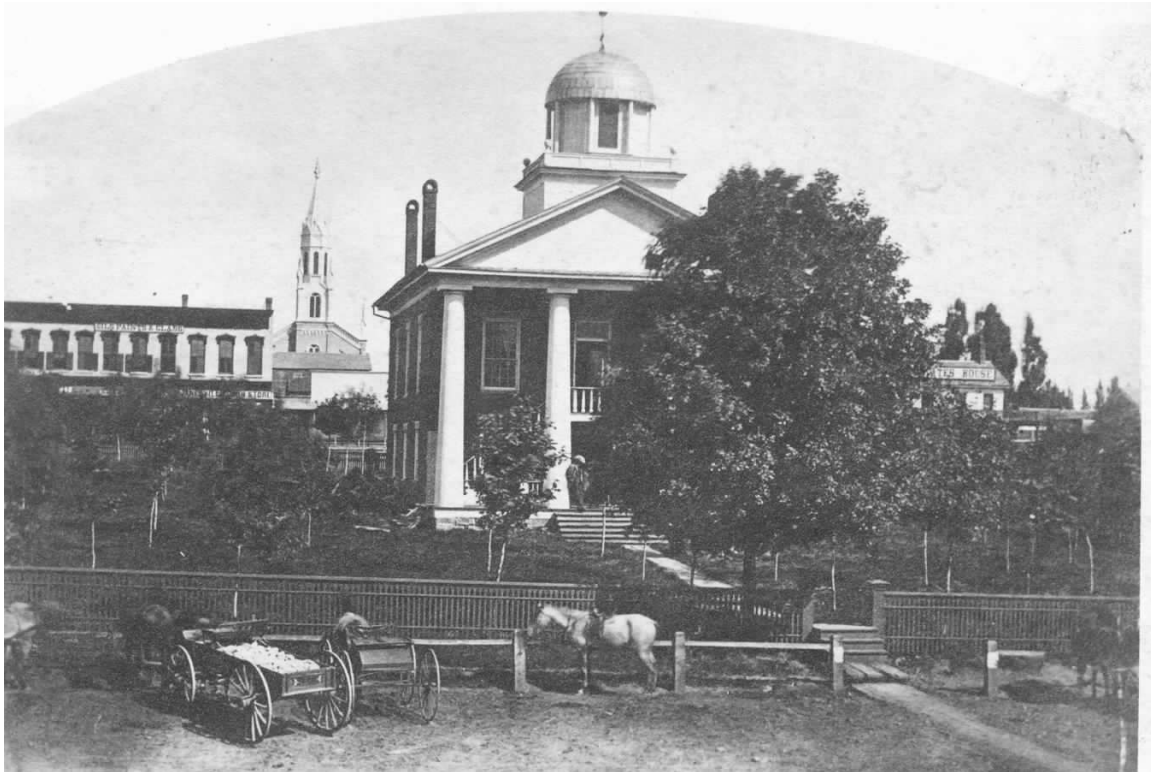
men had been held “as close as prisoners for nearly three weeks.” The seven orphans were scattered “among relatives and former neighbors of the unhappy man and wife.”

The Sun reported on April 5 that Brahm was “pretty well blessed with cheek. As he was leaving the court after the trial he made a modest demand for witness fees, which the Judge said he was entitled to. He is also entitled to mileage. He got his money, upwards of \$40. So much for possessing gall.”

Judge Bennett sentenced Mrs. Stuessy to life in prison on April 10. He “found relief in tears - tears of compassion and sorrow that did honor to his nature and to his manhood,” according to the Sun.

Mrs. Stuessy spent less than a year in prison, passing away of pneumonia after an illness of only a few days. A telegraph was received here with that news on Saturday, March 25, 1885. According to the Sentinel, “While in prison she was exemplary in conduct, and worked for her children’s comfort during her spare time, knitting and making clothing for them. Money was sent to purchase materials for such articles.”

Thirty years after the murder, a hearing for a pardon for Brahm was heard on April 20, 1912. Unfortunately, there is now no access to the newspapers to know whether anything was reported locally about this.



The murder trials for both Burkhard Brahm and Mrs. Stuessy for the murder of Mrs. Stuessy’s husband in 1882 were held in this Courthouse. The jurors attended services at the Universalist Church in a body on Sunday March 23, 1883 during the trial for Mrs. Stuessy. The tall steeple of the Universalist Church can be seen in the background.