

Wife Beating Was Quite Common in the Area in the 1800s

One of the sad realities that I've found about life in early Green County is that it wasn't uncommon for men to beat their wives. It was amazing how many details were included in the newspapers at the time. The one that I am sharing today certainly shared some gruesome details.

Nathan T. Hanson was "a man of rather more than ordinary ability, and possessed of considerable property, real and personal" in Jordan township. On Saturday evening, June 14, 1873, Mrs. Hanson told him that she was going to walk the 10 miles into Monroe the following morning to see her mother. Mr. Hanson told her that she had to stay home to "look over beans for him to plant that day." She retorted, "If you wanted the beans looked over why didn't you tell me so before, and I would have done them?" He said that it made no difference, she was to stay home.

"After a few more words, Mr. Hanson got up, seized her by the shoulders, thrust her out doors, and ordered her never to come in the house again. She sat down on a wagon tongue a short distance from the house and commenced crying bitterly. Her husband soon came out and ordered her to 'dry up!' She still continued crying, whereupon he took her into the stable yard, and, with a piece of leather 'tug' gave her a severe beating. Then, still crying, she lay down in a corner of the fence, and he went into the house. After a short time he went to her and told her to get up and go into the cow stable - the manure not having been cleaned out since the cows stood there - and sleep, as she would take cold out doors. He got some hay for her to sleep on and told her to enter. She refused." He gave her five minutes to go inside, which she did. He fastened her in and told her to leave in the morning and never come back.

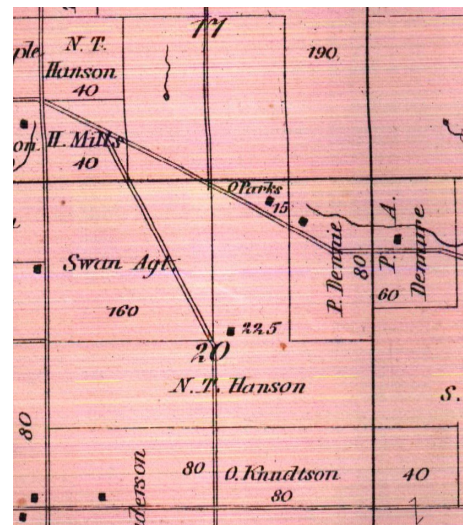
She waited for him to go to sleep and crawled out between the logs of the stable, which were 7.5 inches apart in the widest place. She then walked into Monroe, arriving at 2:00 a.m., and talked to her relatives who advised her to apply for divorce. Her affidavit showed that she had been abused for more than five years, that he had threatened to kill her, that he had tried to force her to sign away any right she had to any property they had acquired.

Court Commissioner Abbott directed the Sheriff, with assistance from D. C. Cleaveland, to take her to the house to retrieve articles for housekeeping purposes. Hanson was at the house, and friendly, when they arrived. The Sheriff told Hanson that he would like to feed his horses some oats. All of the men went out to get the oats to feed the horses. When the Sheriff and Cleaveland went to unhitch the horses, Hanson started for the granary to get the oats. "Before the team could be unhitched the Sheriff was alarmed by an outcry in the house, and running in, caught Hanson just as he had his hand raised to strike his wife a finishing blow with a large monkey-wrench." It appeared that he had already hit her three times; the one in the middle of her forehead broke the skull leaving a wound in the shape of the letter V, extended. Another hit had destroyed her left eye. The bones on the middle finger of her right hand were crushed from when it was believed that she tried to protect herself from the first blow.

Hanson told the Sheriff that when he started for the granary to get the oats, he remembered that the half bushel was upstairs in the house and went to get it. He saw the wrench lying in the house when he went by and grabbed and used it. The wife says she had no warning of the attack; he rushed and struck her without a word.

She was attended by Doctors Hall and Bradshaw. She was doing as well as could be expected by Tuesday. The neighbors were doing all in their power to give her as much relief and to carry out the doctors' instructions "with zeal and fidelity."

Mr. Hanson was in the custody of the Sheriff, "awaiting the result of his murderous attack upon his wife." Another short article on July 9 stated that Mrs. Hanson was "slowly recovering, yet she is not considered out of danger." Hanson was "still in the



This portion of the 1873 plat map of Jordan Township shows that Nathan T. Hanson owned more than 200 acres in Section 20. He also owned 40 acres in Section 17 and the same amount in Section 28. It appears the homestead was located along what is now Ridge Road south of County Y. It is sad that a man who had accumulated that much property could be so cruel to his wife.

county jail awaiting the result of his crime.” I never found anything in the newspapers about the trial.

However, five years later, on January 16, it was reported that Hanson had served his time and had returned to Monroe a week earlier. The editor, as usual, did not hold back any of his opinions. “Mr. Hanson was not received with any degree of cordiality in this locality. It is hoped that Hanson, who is a man of some ability, education and intelligence, will make an effort to mend his ways and govern his terrible temper in the few years of life that may yet be his. Perhaps a new country, new scenes, and new associations would mitigate, somewhat in that direction.”

It is unknown where the wife and his children had lived during his incarceration. Unfortunately, Mrs. Hanson passed away on November 30, 1881 after a brief illness. Her obituary said that she “was a devoted mother, and sacrificed herself continually for the welfare and comfort of her children.” The obituary never mentioned her first name (Mary Jane) nor how many children she had, only that she “left a family of nearly grown children.” She was buried from her sister’s residence in Monroe.

I’ll share a few more sad incidents in a few weeks.