

CCHS Heritage Notes for
1-14-14

DAKOTA'S FIRST LYNCHING (excerpts from book by Gregory J. Nedved)

The first known hanging in Dakota Territory reportedly took place in Clay County and near Vermillion on the evening February 26, 1866. James Hogan, estimated to be in his mid 20's, was found suspended by a small rope from a roadside tree near the mouth of the Vermillion River about 10:00 pm.

Reports are sketchy, but indicate that Hogan may have been out for revenge toward a man named Burgess. Hogan blamed Burgess for allegedly burning down his cabin a few days before and Hogan had attempted to murder Burgess earlier in the day on February 26. Hogan apparently decided that Burgess was the arsonist because, during the burning, he had detained a small boy who was the younger brother of Burgess. After Hogan held the boy over the flames and scorched his hair and face, the boy confessed that he thought his older brother had done it.

As he lost everything in the fire, Hogan became liquored up with whiskey and tried to shoot Burgess several times with his navy revolver in James McHenry's store. The pistol malfunctioned and prevented Hogan from succeeding. He then tried to shoot people out in the street, but again the pistol failed to work properly.

Hogan was subdued by a man named Patrick Hand who gave the gun to Captain Nelson Miner. Miner locked it in the back of the U.S. Land office, where he worked as registrar. Hogan then tried to forcibly get his gun back to "shoot Burgess", but Miner was able to wrestle him out into the street and turn him over to a group of Iowa soldiers who were quartered in town.

What happened next is less clear, but Hogan was reportedly taken inside their quarters and was next seen hanging from the tree about 10:00 pm that night.