
More praise for *Murder in Minnesota*

“A fine example of true-crime writing
for all devotees of that form.”

Lenore Glen Offord · *San Francisco Chronicle*

“As authentic history as wars, depressions,
and Presidential elections.”

Sergeant Cuff · *Saturday Review*

“A virtual *Who's Who* of Minnesota murderers.”

Susan Hamre · *Minnesota Monthly*

“A classic of regional popular history.”

D. J. Tice · *St. Paul Pioneer Press*

MURDER
IN
MINNESOTA

A Collection of True Cases

Walter N. Trenerry



Minnesota Historical Society Press

© 1962, 1985 by the Minnesota Historical Society. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write to the Minnesota Historical Society Press, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

www.mnhs.org/mhspress

♻️ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Science—Permanence for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

International Standard Book Number 0-87351-180-8
Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Trenerry, Walter N., 1917—

Murder in Minnesota.

Reprint Originally published: St. Paul : Minnesota Historical Society, 1962.

1. Murder—Minnesota—Case studies. 2. Crime and criminals—

Minnesota—Biography. I. Title.

Ebook ISBN: 978-0-87351-744-7

HV6533.M6T7 1985 364.1'523'09776 84-20652

All photographs and sketches in the illustrations section are from the Minnesota Historical Society Collections unless otherwise noted.

Cover design: Percolator

Preface

This book surveys the art of murder as practiced in the North Star State between 1858, when Minnesota was admitted to the Union, and 1917. The volume arbitrarily ends in 1917, not because Minnesotans stopped killing each other in that year, but because murders do not take place in a vacuum and reviving those which occurred after 1917 might bring needless embarrassment to numerous living persons who have already suffered the notoriety that surrounds a murder case.

Minnesota is surprisingly rich in homicidal lore, and I freely admit that other equally interesting collections could be made without duplicating the examples I have chosen. These cases—which include several well-known ones as well as others that are obscure—appealed to me because each seemed to have some slight touch, some little flair, that took it out of the humdrum. In making this selection, I attempted to put together a readable book that would introduce a number of lively people who have not found their way into classic history texts. For Minnesota has had its great criminals as well as its important social builders. Many of the latter have received Clio's attention. Most of the former have not. I hope partially to redress the balance and give the historical underdog his day. Some of these murderers had great ability; they outshone in ingenuity their contemporaries in public life, albeit they might have put their abilities to better uses.

In these pages, too, some of Minnesota's leading men appear in unusual roles. Isaac Atwater, a member of the state's first supreme court, hears a habeas corpus petition based on allegations of fraudulent arrest; his colleague on the supreme bench, Charles E. Flandrau, defends a drunken rioter and pleads his case before Horace Austin, a district judge, who is better known as Minnesota's governor from 1870 to 1874. Jay Cooke, nineteenth-century builder of financial empires, brings political influence to bear in the case of a plasterer, and Ignatius L. Donnelly, as fiery a politician and versatile a pioneer as any state produced, signs a petition requesting the pardon of a woman. William Mitchell, one of Minnesota's great jurists, presides over a case involving a drunken party that began in a house of joy, while his famous son, William D. Mitchell, who later became United States attorney general, acts for a woman indicted for murder. William W. Erwin, who is well known as a Populist orator but who was also considered one of the greatest American criminal lawyers of his day, defended three accused murderers.

To read through these cases chronologically is to see a large segment of Minnesota history

To view history in terms of murder is perhaps extracanonial, but this angle of sight, like many others, illuminates changes in attitudes, laws, and fashions which are the substance of man's record. During the period from 1857 to 1917, motives for murder did not change, but Minnesota did. In 1857 the area was a largely unsettled wilderness on the verge of becoming a state. It had its lynchings and vigilantes, its two-gun men and speculators. Sixty years later it had substantially developed into the modern commonwealth we know today—urbanized and orderly, with the headaches caused by automobile traffic. Indians were no longer a menace; the wild frontier had been conquered, and the rich prairies and forests of the region supported a prosperous agricultural and industrial society.

Until 1911 the penalty for murder in the first degree was the rough, old, English method of death by hanging. During the years from 1858 to 1911 approximately twenty-six persons were hanged in Minnesota. It is necessary to say approximately because the executions were carried out in the counties of conviction. No central registry exists and some records may have been lost. A summary of the hangings known to have taken place in Minnesota may be found at the end of this book.

As Minnesota developed, attitudes toward criminals and punishment shifted dramatically. Psychologists in comparatively recent times have managed to arouse a not wholly merited sympathy for the criminal. Today it is often "Society" which is said to be responsible, rather than the individual who pulls the trigger. The development of this attitude, which flowered during the reform movements of the early 1900s, was in part responsible for Minnesota's abolishing capital punishment in 1911.

It is fairly safe to say that capital punishment was never really popular in the state. Judges pronounced the death sentence with distaste and governors commuted more sentences to life imprisonment than they issued warrants for hanging. Once abolished, capital punishment was never restored. Life imprisonment is still the maximum penalty imposed in the North Star State, and in 1960 Minnesota was one of only nine states in the nation which did not inflict capital punishment, according to the *New York Times* of March 3, 1960.

The year following the abolishment of the death penalty, the Minnesota Supreme Court articulated the state's new policy toward criminals. In the State of Minnesota *ex rel.* John Kelly v. Henry Wolfer (119 *Minnesota* 368), the court said that "one of the principal aims, and indeed, not the predominant one, of our penal system is reform.... Anciently, when, under the barbarous doctrine of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, 'punishment' was deemed to be, as the word implies, largely compensatory, the natural and logical conception of a sentence for a crime was that the 'punishment' should be nicely graduated to the nature and circumstances of the offense.... The modern conception of 'punishment,' however ... takes practically no account of compensation; the only survival thereof being found in the attempt at prevention by means of deterring examples and by confinement of and restrictions upon criminals considered dangerous to be at large.... No longer is proportionate punishment to be meted out to the criminal, measure for measure; but the unfortunate offender is to be committed to the charge of the officers of the state, as a sort of penitential ward, to be restrained so far as necessary to protect the public from recurrent manifestations of his

criminal tendencies ... but, if possible, to be reformed, cured of his criminality, and finally released, a normal man, and a rehabilitated citizen." Both concepts of punishment are reflected in the cases here presented, which mirror varying attitudes toward criminals over the years.

In spite of social change, however, the public attitude toward murder seems to have remained constant between 1858 and 1917. It continues to be the most serious crime in the statute book and it is still punished the most severely. For this reason, homicide makes interesting reading; the stakes are high for both murderer and victim.

My investigation of Minnesota murders over the years revealed no new motives for killing anyone. The old ones are perfectly satisfactory. People murdered to get rid of wives, husbands, mistresses, and lovers; to speed wealthy relatives to their eternal rest; to collect life insurance; to satisfy resentments; and for all the other reasons generated by social friction. Nor did I discover any new or unique ways of killing people. Minnesotans apparently found the oldest and simplest methods entirely adequate. In the frequency of use, firearms come first in Minnesota, then, oddly enough, axes and other blunt instruments. Poisoning is comparatively rare; in the most celebrated Minnesota cases women administered the dose, so there may be some truth in the saying that poison is a woman's weapon. Minnesota murderers who used guns seemed to have a favorite point of aim. A surprising number of their victims were shot behind the ear.

I hope you will find the following Minnesota murders interesting. I regret that I could not report the most ingenious and remarkable ones that took place in the state. They looked like accidents or natural deaths and were never discovered.

Walter N. Trener

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

July 10, 1962

Contents

Chapter 1. Death Travels by River Boat

The Murder of John B. Bodell and the Lynching of Charles J. Rinehart, Lexington, 1858

Chapter 2. War in Wright County

The Murder of Henry A. Wallace, 1858, and the Lynching of Oscar F. Jackson, Rockford, 1859

Chapter 3. Not to Foster, But to Slay

The Murder of Stanislaus Bilansky, St. Paul, 1859

Chapter 4. The Christmas Murders

The Lynchings of John L. Campbell, Mankato, 1865, Alexander Campbell and George Liscom, New Ulm, 1866, and the Murder of John Spenner

Chapter 5. Rally, Philadelphians!

The Murder of George W. Northup, Duluth, 1869

Chapter 6. Bobolink's Last War Whoop

The Murder of the John Cook Family, Oak Lake, 1872

Chapter 7. The Lady Vanishes

The Disappearance of Helen McArthur, Crow Wing, and the Lynchings of Gegoonce and Tebekokechickwabe, Brainerd, 1872

Chapter 8. Highwaymen Came Riding

The Murders of Joseph L. Heywood and Nicholas Gustavson, Northfield, 1876

Chapter 9. A Night with French Lou

[Chapter 10. Two Affronted Ladies](#)

*The Murders of John Murphy, St. Paul, 1887, and
James Scanlan, Minneapolis, 1888*

[Chapter 11. High Stakes and Green Goods](#)

The Murder of Katherine Ging, Minneapolis, 1894

[Chapter 12. The End of the Rope](#)

The Murders of Johnny and Mary Keller, St. Paul, 1905

[Chapter 13. Six Women Who Kept a Secret](#)

The Murder of Louis Arhogast, St. Paul, 1909

[Chapter 14. The Case of the Convenient Cliff](#)

The Murder of Mary Fridley Price, Minneapolis, 1914

[Chapter 15. Murder by Professionals](#)

The Murder of Alice McQuillan Dunn, St. Paul, 1917

[Appendix—Those Who Were Hanged](#)

[A Note on Criminal Procedure](#)

[Footnotes](#)

Dedicated to

CLOTHO, LACHESIS, AND ATROPOS,
*whose inexorable decisions are
recorded herein*

MURDER IN MINNESOTA

Death Travels by River Boat

On the Minnesota frontier of the 1850s, the settlers praised the majesty of the law but often ignored it. The story of John B. Bodell and Charles J. Rinehart is a classic tale of frontier life moving through river boat traffic to isolated settlements, peopled with Indians, greenhorns, and sharpers, and concluding with a grim necktie party to avenge the death of a traveler whose lonely wife awaited him in the East.¹

Like many good workmen, Bodell, a thirty-six-year-old carpenter of Leominster, Massachusetts, was thrown out of employment when the Panic of 1857 drastically upset the American economy. Finding nothing in his own part of the country, he took Horace Greeley's famous advice and went west to St. Louis, Missouri, in May, 1858. There he secured work and remained over the summer. When his wife visited him in August, he told her that "there was a man" in St. Louis "who had some land to sell in Minnesota."² A month later Bodell made his way up the Mississippi River to the region that had become a state only four short months before.

Charles J. Rinehart had Minnesota land to sell and, one suspects, a keen eye for a greenhorn. He had gone to Minnesota in 1855. After following the usual pattern of moving from place to place and trying occupation after occupation, he had settled down in 1857 to saloonkeeping in the thriving village of St. Peter on the lower Minnesota River. Some time between 1855 and 1858 he established a claim to 160 acres of land near Lexington in the northeastern corner of heavily timbered Le Sueur County.

Between the time of Rinehart's arrival and the Panic of 1857, speculation in Minnesota lands exceeded all bounds. Fortunes were made and lost overnight as gamblers and legitimate settlers fought to establish claims to the recently opened lands of the Minnesota River Valley. After the panic hit in August, 1857, the speculative bubble burst, and there was no market for land that formerly sold at high prices. By the fall of 1858, Rinehart may well have been worried about how to find a buyer for his claim near Lexington.

In September of that year he abruptly left his saloon in charge of his father-in-law, sent his wife and children back to their original home in Springfield, Ohio, and went to St. Paul, the Minnesota capital. Soon, as though answering some prearranged signal, he left St. Paul to travel southward along the Mississippi. In those days rivers served as highways, for few roads

and no railroads existed in the new state.

Rinehart and Bodell met around October 1, 1858, probably at the Mississippi River town of Winona. Exactly how they met is not known, but both men had connections in Winona where they must have had some mutual acquaintance. Before he left Winona, Bodell told his friends there that he would soon return.

By October 4 the two strangers were cruising up the Mississippi aboard the steamer "Pembina." While on the boat, Bodell wrote his wife that he "was going to see a farm of 160 acres, that could be bought for \$200, in Lexington."³ Rinehart wrote his wife, telling her to return to Minnesota with the children.

When the men reached the village of Hastings, Bodell made inquiries about his traveling companion. One man warned him strongly against continuing the trip, even though Bodell said that he found Rinehart a "good, sociable sort." Apparently impressed by the warning, Bodell asked his informant to write Mrs. Bodell in Leominster "if anything did happen to him." The carpenter was thought to be carrying three to four hundred dollars in cash—a sizable sum in those days. He never revealed exactly how much money he had and made no effort to create an impression of wealth. Wearing a coarse, heavy overcoat, he carried a valise as his only luggage.⁴

Leaving the Mississippi, the two men continued their journey westward to Northfield and Union Lake. They reached the latter Rice County settlement on October 5. The next morning they set out in a rented buggy. Bodell told the family with whom they stayed that he would return that night or the next. About noon on October 7, 1858, the two men were seen walking the last six miles toward Rinehart's claim.

An hour and a half later, at 1:30 P.M., Rinehart stopped at a farmhouse and asked the owner if he could have something to eat. Bodell was not with him. After eating, Rinehart borrowed a spade, saying that he wanted to fix a place in the road. He left the farmhouse taking the spade with him. By 2:00 P.M. he was back at the house, where he drank some coffee, chatted easily for two hours, and left.

Rinehart spent the next five days in the small, near-by village of Lexington. Bodell did not appear and his companion made no inquiries about him. On October 13 Rinehart left Lexington; by October 16 he was in St. Paul, where he told a friend that he was on his way to Rochester to buy a saloon.

Although Bodell's absence excited no alarm at Lexington, it did cause comment at Union Lake and Winona, where he had said that he would return. Late in October Bodell's Winona friends made the long trip to Lexington to look for him. Speedily organized search parties combed the fields near Rinehart's claim. By accident, the searchers found what they sought. One of the group stepped off a log and, feeling the ground yield under his feet, dug in the soft spot and found Bodell's valise. Another lost his footing in a swampy area. He grasped a willow shoot to break his fall, but it came away in his hand. Noticing that the end had been cut and the shoot apparently set there deliberately, he tested other willows nearby. They, too, had been set out.

A little digging revealed Bodell's body. It had a bullet hole above the left eye and stabbing

wounds on the back of the head; in addition, Bodell's throat had been cut from ear to ear. The shallow, willow-covered grave lay about half a mile from the place where Bodell and Rinehart had last been seen walking together, and an equal distance from the farmhouse where Rinehart had borrowed the spade.

The aroused citizenry of Lexington swung into action. Firmly convinced of the murderer's identity, they sent S. J. Wise, Le Sueur County sheriff, and a deputy down the Minnesota River in pursuit of Rinehart. The citizens also convoked an extraordinary public meeting on October 26 in which they appointed a Committee of Five "to draw up a letter of condolence to the widow and distressed family of the deceased," to prepare an account of the murder for newspaper publication, and very likely, as later events suggest, to consider summary penalty measures.⁵

The committee's account of the murder is, to say the least, a curious outpouring devoid of regard for fair play or due process of law. It opened: "The following is undoubtedly, one of the most foul and atrocious murders ever committed in any community. For barbarity, it has scarce an equal in the annals of our country, and committed, as it was undoubtedly, to obtain a paltry sum of money, we can but look upon the perpetrator as a villain of the blackest dye." The "perpetrator" was indicated to be Rinehart. The intemperate report was printed in the *Minnesota Free Press* of St. Peter on November 3, 1858, before any formal charges had been made.

Meanwhile, Bodell's wife in Leominster received a letter postmarked October 15 at St. Paul. Purportedly from her husband, the missive advised her that he had fallen ill and would return to Massachusetts when he recovered. Mrs. Bodell pronounced the letter an absolute fabrication, saying that it was neither in the style nor the handwriting of her husband.

Unaware of his pursuers, Rinehart left St. Paul aboard the steamboat "Denmark" on October 17. Two weeks later he was in the river village of La Crescent near the Minnesota-Iowa border, where his wife and children met him and where he planned to open another saloon. There three men visited him on October 30—Sheriff Wise, his deputy, and Alfred J. Brackett, deputy sheriff of Ramsey County, who was then at the beginning of a career that was to make him a well-known manhunter. Beyond the borders of their own counties, and acting before a formal accusation had been made, these officers had no legal authority.

Brackett demanded that Rinehart surrender. As it happened, Michael E. Ames, a St. Paul lawyer who was known as "the Chesterfield of the Minnesota bar," was present when the pursuers confronted the pursued.⁶ Advising Rinehart that the arrest was absolutely unlawful, the lawyer said that Rinehart would be justified in shooting his way out and that if he did so, he, Ames, would defend him. Brackett then drew a large pistol, aimed it at Rinehart's head, and threatened to fire if he moved. Rinehart submitted, but he denied knowing about the murder or having any connection with it. He would be glad, he said, to have an immediate trial to clear himself. Concealing the fact of his arrest from his wife, he told her that he must make a business trip to Lexington and departed with his captors.

The people of St. Paul let Rinehart pass quietly through the city, but the villagers along the Minnesota River did not. The inflammatory account of the Lexington committee had done its

work. Various unofficial receptions were organized when it was known that “Rinehart the Murderer” was coming. Mobs gathered at Shakopee, Belle Plaine, and Henderson. At Le Sueur—amid cries of “Hang him! Hang him!”—Rinehart’s captors transferred him to a wagon and drove him to Lexington.⁷

That village had no jail. Under such circumstances it was usual at the time to send prisoners to the nearest military post, the Ramsey County jail in St. Paul, or the state penitentiary at Stillwater to await trial, but the aroused Lexingtonians would have none of this, “so strong in their determination that in this case justice shall be meted out to the guilty,” reported the *Free Press* of November 10. The people of Lexington promptly built their own jail—for one prisoner.

Rinehart’s preliminary examination, set for November 4, 1858, took place in a violent and hostile atmosphere. The newspapers must be blamed for a great deal of this, and they, in turn, were undoubtedly influenced by the Lexington Committee of Five. On November 3, the day before the hearing, the *Free Press* indulged in a long article about the case. The paper stated that lynching Rinehart was a daily topic of conversation at Lexington, and concluded moralistically but suggestively, that “Lynch law is never justifiable, except *when all other remedies fail.*”

From other valley towns as far away as Mankato, the curious crowded to attend the hearing, which served as a combined preliminary examination and coroner’s inquest. Rinehart had competent counsel in the person of Martin J. Severance of Henderson, and in spite of the hostile atmosphere the proceedings went forward under the regular forms of law. Unfortunately for the prisoner, who may have been intimidated by them, crowds of the same people who had threatened him on his way to Lexington attended the hearing, where they glared at him, quietly and ominously.

Rinehart testified that he had separated from Bodell at noon on October 7, 1858. A short time later, Rinehart said, he had met a party of Indians on the road, and when Bodell did not reappear, Rinehart thought that the Indians must have seized him. The saloonkeeper was not so clear about why he borrowed the spade. At one time he said he used it to fix the road; at another, to dig a drainage ditch; and in still a third version, he claimed to have used the implement in repairing a shanty on his claim.

The prosecution introduced testimony showing that no Indians had been seen near the area on October 7. It also brought out several new and interesting facts: Bodell’s body had heel marks imprinted on it, as if someone had stamped it into the ground; the marks corresponded with those made by Rinehart’s boots; the spade borrowed by Rinehart had a broken corner which left a characteristic mark; such marks were found at Bodell’s grave.

The defense offered nothing in rebuttal.

On this evidence the coroner’s jury on November 5, 1858, brought in its verdict that the death of John B. Bodell was “caused by wounds from a knife and pistol in the hands of Charles J. Rhinehart [*sic*].”⁸ The prisoner was accordingly bound over for trial at the next term of the district court, which was expected to convene in March or April, 1859. Rinehart

was remanded to his solitary jail.

The day after the hearing ended, a story in the *St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat* suddenly alleged that Rinehart's brother-in-law accused him of having taken a trip in the spring of 1858 with another stranger who was never seen again. This tale was soon shown to be completely false.⁹ A few days later, on November 9, basing its account upon an undisclosed source, the *Pioneer and Democrat* published an article headed "IMPORTANT NEWS!—RINEHART, THE MURDERER, LYNCHED!" It painted a lively picture of the prisoner's summary trial and his sudden demise. This, too, was a complete fraud, which the newspaper retracted on November 13. On November 10 the *Free Press* published a true account of Rinehart's preliminary examination, but used it as the basis for an extraordinary editorial defense of lynching. The true public enemies, the editor said, were those so concerned with safeguards for criminals on trial that they overlooked the just claims of law-abiding citizens. "It is this laxity of our laws," he continued, "and their application, too, which has, and ever will, lead to ... more violence and lynch law." Were these articles, which appeared so close together, planted by the Lexington committee?

While the newspapers tried his case, Rinehart did his best to escape. A powerful man, he broke the handcuffs which he wore by day and would have been free if his jailer had not discovered the broken manacles. The jailer then told him that he must now be more securely chained; hearing this the prisoner fell into a "fit." Although Rinehart appears to have been quite sound mentally and physically, his nerves gave way on several critical occasions under the tension to which he was subjected. After this attempt to escape, he was additionally secured by leg irons fastened to the floor. Somewhat later he managed to break these, and when his jailer unlocked the handcuffs for the night, Rinehart sprang to the door and was away. Snow covered the ground, and it was easy to follow his tracks. He was found little more than a mile from the jail lying unconscious in the snow. He had fainted. The newspapers gave prominent space to his efforts to escape. In these attempts, the prisoner undoubtedly played into the hands of the Lexington group by making himself appear a dangerous criminal using every means to evade just punishment.

Imprisoned again after a taste of freedom, Rinehart awaited his fate. He did not have to wait long. On December 26, 1858, a mob gathered around the Lexington jail and demanded Rinehart. Upon the jailer's very proper refusal, the crowd went away. The jailer, however, took no steps to secure additional guards or to move his prisoner to a safer place. Next day, just after noon, an unruly assortment of some sixty men, claiming to come from adjoining Rice County and purportedly made up "principally" of Irishmen, Germans, and Indian half-breeds, surrounded the jail and demanded the key. The jailer again refused, but was overpowered after defending "himself and his prisoner with great courage." The key was taken from him and the jail door speedily opened.¹⁰

This time Rinehart did not faint. Pulling his hands through his handcuffs with such force as to strip the skin, he wrenched from the floor the clamp which held his leg irons, broke the leg from the jail stove to use as a weapon, and faced his attackers. Holding the stove leg in his

raw and bleeding hands, Rinehart single-handedly held off the mob for an hour and a half. No one dared approach him. During this time, some of the attackers jabbed a sharpened stick at him through the jail window, but succeeded only in bruising him and inflicting a gash above his left eye. Lacking courage to close with their victim directly, some of the rioters finally managed to remove a portion of the jail roof. At this, Rinehart's nerves again failed him, and he fainted. The mob swarmed in. Rinehart was taken.

The unconscious man was flung upon a sled, a rope was fastened around his neck, and he was driven a short distance to a convenient tree. There the mob strung him up, but the amateur hangmen bungled. The noose tightened around Rinehart's chin instead of his throat and he was lowered to the ground. At this terrible moment the unfortunate man regained consciousness. Realizing what was happening, he pitifully asserted his innocence of any crime and then asked that someone pray for him. A bystander volunteered, delivering a short prayer during which all the lynchers knelt reverently as if in appreciation of a blessing on their work. When the prayer ended, Rinehart again shouted that he had not murdered Bodell. He was nevertheless hanged at once. A few minutes later his body was thrown into a shallow grave at the foot of the gallows tree and briskly covered with dirt.

The Leominster carpenter was avenged. For a time the air was full of denunciations of the lawless act and clamors for action against the rioters, but nothing was ever done. In Lexington and the surrounding area, where the Committee of Five seems to have handled its public relations well, nine out of ten residents were reported to feel that Rinehart's punishment had been just.

Was justice in fact done? Since the case never came to trial, there is very little evidence to consider. The only purportedly complete account of the trip made by Bodell and Rinehart from Winona to Lexington appears in the newspaper release furnished by the Committee of Five. There is, nevertheless, enough information to indulge in some legal speculation.

In criminal cases the prosecution must prove the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. In the Rinehart case the question must turn on whether or not defense counsel could insinuate a reasonable doubt into the minds of a jury.

It must be admitted that the defense would have an uphill fight after the jury heard the prosecution's evidence showing that Bodell disappeared on a trip with Rinehart, the man's phenomenal lack of curiosity about his companion's disappearance, the similarity of the hole and spade marks at Bodell's grave, and Rinehart's confused explanations about why he borrowed a spade. Moreover, it looked as if everything unrolled in accordance with a carefully preconceived plan. Even as he traveled northward with Bodell, Rinehart wrote his family to rejoin him at La Crescent; and after throwing an inquirer off the track by saying that he was going to Rochester, Rinehart, his mission apparently accomplished, rejoined his wife and children at La Crescent. The circle was complete. Although it is purely circumstantial—as the evidence in most murder cases since murderers are not usually obliging enough to appear before witnesses—this evidence is sufficient to justify a verdict of guilty.

The argument for Rinehart is not, however, hopeless.

(1) What happened to Bodell's money? The murder was assumed to have been committed for money, but no one showed that Rinehart needed cash, or that he had any more funds after the murder than before. If Bodell's money were on his person when his body was found, it is quite possible that the finder appropriated it, and it is not likely that he would speak up.

(2) Bodell's throat was cut. This usually produces a torrent of blood; yet no one who saw Rinehart within an hour of the probable time of Bodell's death noticed any blood or stains on him.

(3) Were there indeed no Indians in the area? During the Sioux Uprising, which took place not far west of Lexington four years later, it was apparent that the Indians, like ghosts, may appear to some and remain invisible to others.

(4) Who wrote the letter which Mrs. Bodell said was a forgery? It was never sent to Minnesota for handwriting comparison as it would have been if the case had come to trial, and it was obviously written by someone who knew a great deal about Bodell's activities.

(5) Rinehart's conduct after Bodell's disappearance was strangely lethargic for a murderer. After staying five days in Lexington, he drifted down the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers, taking two weeks to make a trip which could have been made in three or four days. When seized, he was calmly and openly going about his regular business.

(6) The defense's best argument, however, turns on a question of time. The only source of information—the newspaper account made up by the Lexington Committee of Five, which was certainly not friendly to Rinehart—states that the man asked for lunch at 1:30 P.M., ate it, borrowed a spade, went out, and returned by 2:00 P.M. Thirty minutes is a very short time in which to eat, walk half a mile, bury a body in one place and a valise in another, and walk half a mile back.

A jury might well have had reasonable doubts if these points had been argued, but Rinehart had no chance to present them or to offer any substantive evidence in his favor.

Like King Charles I, nothing in Rinehart's life became him like the leaving of it. The bitter scene of his capture—one injured man defying and holding off a mob determined to seize and hang him—is a somber corrective to those adulators of the past who find every virtue in the crude life of the frontier.

War in Wright County

The Wright County war of 1859, which ended a spiral of murder and violence, accomplished for Minnesota what the Whisky Rebellion of 1794 did for a young American nation. Each firmly established an infant government on a basis of law. By a chain of events the murder of Henry A. Wallace in 1858 led to the so-called Wright County War and the military occupation of that county a year later. Each link in the chain increased the degree of violence, until it culminated in an armed mob threatening the state's attorney general in the courtroom and snatching his prisoner from custody. The murder of Wallace and the lynching of Oscar Jackson were high points in Minnesota anarchy—an anarchy which often prevailed in the process of subduing the American wilderness—and it called for extreme measures to assert the authority of the state.¹

When Henry Wallace of Antrim, New Hampshire, and Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Jackson of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, left their homes in 1857 to journey to Minnesota Territory, they joined the flood-tide of humanity pouring onto the rich southern Minnesota lands recently opened to settlement. Wallace, a bachelor of about twenty-five, and the Jacksons took up adjoining farms in Rockford Township, Wright County, in the Big Woods area of east central Minnesota. At that time the county was only three years old. It was on the very edge of the frontier, which was moving slowly westward as the Sioux evacuated their traditional homelands. Wright County had as yet no telegraph lines, and mail arrived once a week by stagecoach. Times were hard, for the Panic of 1857 had drained money from the territory. Everyone was in debt; banks were closed; and business in Minnesota was at a virtual standstill. Many citizens had to rely on barter for life's necessities.

Jackson was poor. He made no secret of it, complaining to his neighbors about his poverty and asking for credit. One gets the impression that he made a nuisance of himself with his complaints and solicitations, since later events show a curious amount of ill will toward him in the community which only recently had elected him town supervisor and justice of the peace. Wallace, on the other hand, had money. This in itself was unusual in those hard times. Wallace, moreover, had unusual money. He consistently used, and was the only man in the Rockford area to have, notes issued by the Amoskeag Bank of Manchester, New Hampshire.

A man trying to farm alone inevitably needs help in some things, and in midsummer

1858 Wallace, who was also the local tax assessor, hired Jackson to help him with the hay. The two made a common type of farm agreement under which Jackson was to receive half the hay in exchange for his labor in cutting and storing it. On August 27 the men were observed working together in Wallace's fields.

Nearly a month later a neighbor remarked that he had not seen Wallace since that date. Jackson, however, had been frequently in evidence. He had, in fact, mysteriously acquired money—all of it in the form of Amoskeag Bank notes. When asked about Wallace's disappearance, Jackson showed no curiosity, but other neighbors were concerned. On September 19 a group of them went to Wallace's cabin and found it empty and in perfect order. Two days later the neighbors made up a search party, which Jackson did not join.

After combing the fields briefly, the group found Wallace's body lying in a clump of bushes near the spot where he had been seen mowing with Jackson twenty-five days earlier. His head had been crushed by repeated blows. According to the *Monticello Times* of October 1858, a promptly summoned coroner's jury "of 12 of the best citizens" found that Wallace "came to his death by blows from an axe or heavy instrument in the hands of a person or persons unknown."

Unknown but not unsuspected. The grand jury convened at Monticello, and on October 1858, indicted Jackson for Wallace's murder. In the absence of a local jail, the prisoner was sent to Fort Ripley, a military post near Brainerd, for confinement until his trial at the next district court term to be held in the spring.

While Jackson languished in the guardhouse, Hiram L. Wallace, the dead man's brother, arrived from New Hampshire to spur the prosecution and to act as a kind of avenging Nemesis. Hiram had his brother's body exhumed from its burial place on the Rockford claim and reinterred at St. Anthony, the flourishing town that later became a part of Minneapolis. Hiram also dutifully went through the dead man's possessions and found that Henry's money, rifle, gold watch, and a blanket were missing.

On March 29, 1859, Oscar Jackson came to trial in a cold and hostile atmosphere. He had already received threats against his life, and he saw little warmth in the eyes of his neighbors who crowded the courtroom. The prosecution quickly showed that Wallace died by violence, that he was last seen with Jackson, and that Jackson had suddenly come into possession of bank notes known to have been used locally only by Wallace.

Jackson's defense was handled ably by three St. Paul lawyers, one of whom was Willis A. Gorman, former territorial governor of Minnesota and soon to be colonel of its first Civil War regiment. Their argument was ingenious and, as it turned out, convincing. The defense contended that no one could establish the date of Wallace's death, and that between August 27 and September 21 any number of persons could have visited his claim and killed him. Jackson, testifying in his own behalf, explained his lack of curiosity about Wallace's disappearance by saying that he had enough to do on his own farm without taking time to pry into other people's business. As for the money, Jackson claimed that he sold his half of the hay to Wallace, who paid for it in Amoskeag Bank notes.

After deliberating for eighteen hours, and once interrupting their deliberations to ask the

judge for further instructions on reasonable doubt, the jury on April 3, 1859, brought in a verdict of not guilty. While apparently unconvinced of Jackson's innocence, his peers gave him the benefit of the doubt.

The verdict was, to say the least, unpopular and the acquitted man quickly left the area. "It is known that threats have been made against Jackson's life, should he re-appear in the county," reported the *Pioneer and Democrat* of April 13, 1859, "and it is said that fifteen men followed him on the night of his acquittal for the purpose of lynching him, but he managed to elude them by escaping into the woods."

Led by the murdered man's brother, a determined group of Wright County citizens did not intend to let the matter rest with the verdict, apparently planning to get Jackson back in the county where they would take the law into their own hands. In furtherance of the scheme, George M. Bertram, Wright County sheriff, Cyrus C. Jenks, justice of the peace, and Wallace's brother set out in pursuit. On April 8 the three men were in Hennepin County, where the sheriff and the justice had no authority. There they learned that Jackson was in St. Paul. A legal mockery then took place among the travelers. Hiram Wallace filed a complaint with Justice Jenks accusing Jackson of stealing molasses, flour, and money from Hiram Wallace's cabin. The justice promptly issued a warrant for Jackson's arrest and handed it to Sheriff Bertram. The sheriff, in turn, delivered the warrant to Alfred Brackett—the Ramsey County deputy sheriff who had apprehended Rinehart in 1858—asking him to arrest Jackson.

Brackett found Jackson in St. Paul's Apollo Saloon the next day. Handcuffing his prisoner, the deputy set out with him for St. Anthony by buggy. Jackson pleaded for time to call his attorney, but at first Brackett would not allow it. On the ride Jackson insisted that his arrest was based on a false charge, the purpose of which was to get him back to Rockford where he would be murdered. Remembering the unfortunate outcome of his arrest of Rinehart not more than five months before, Brackett reconsidered. When the two men reached St. Anthony, he sent word to Jackson's counsel and persuaded the Wright County sheriff to spend the night in town before starting back to Rockford.

Jackson's lawyer moved swiftly, and before the day ended a writ of habeas corpus was served upon Sheriff Bertram. "The excitement at Monticello, and the fears that Jackson will be lynched, are the causes for the issuing of the writ," said the *Pioneer and Democrat* of April 11. A dramatic hearing began that day before the Honorable Isaac Atwater, Minnesota Supreme Court justice and the most convenient jurist of plenary authority. William Lochren, later to serve with distinction in the Civil War and as a United States district judge, appeared for the prosecution. The hearing had to be adjourned when two prosecution witnesses—Jenks and Wallace—"were discovered to have vamosed," as the *Pioneer and Democrat* of April 11 put it.

These men, doubtless advised by counsel, realized that they had made a legal error in serving a warrant made out in Hennepin County. They secured a fast team and returned to Wright County, where Wallace filed another complaint on the basis of which Jenks quickly issued a new arrest warrant. Next morning it was delivered to Sheriff Bertram in the

courtroom just after Justice Atwater had ordered Jackson released. The sheriff promptly rearrested the unhappy Jackson, and Jackson's attorney just as promptly secured and served a new writ of habeas corpus.

That the purpose of the arrest was clear to all is indicated by an account in the *Pioneer and Democrat* of April 13, which reported that the courtroom crowd watched Jackson after his rearrest "to see how he looked under the immediate prospect of being hung to the first tree after he crosses the line into Wright County. ... It is rumored that one hundred men are waiting over the line to take summary measures with Jackson if they can lay their hands on him."

In a second hearing, held on April 13, Jackson was again released on the grounds that the burglary charge was a sham. Freed, he went to St. Paul, where friends and sympathizers raised enough money to enable him to leave Minnesota.

After being acquitted on a first degree murder charge and twice escaping by an eyelash from men who had no scruples about using legal processes for illegal purposes, Jackson should have taken his money and left the state. But those "whom the gods destroy, they first make mad." On April 21—eight days after his second release—Jackson returned to Rockford.

His enemies moved swiftly to take advantage of his folly. This time a neighbor named Aymer or Emery W. Moore went to Buffalo, the county seat, and swore to a complaint before a different but equally obliging justice of the peace. It again alleged that Jackson had stolen flour and other articles from Henry Wallace's cabin. The justice issued a warrant for Jackson's arrest and delivered it to his tireless pursuer, Sheriff Bertram, who in this chronic carries on the evil tradition exemplified by the sheriff of Nottingham.

Meanwhile an armed mob surrounded the house of Jackson's father-in-law, George Holdship. After shouting for Jackson to come out and being told that he was not there, the crowd camped about the house, building fires near it. They then went to Jackson's own nearby cabin and literally tore it apart, throwing furniture and bedding from it, breaking down partitions, and setting more fires. The crowd continued its siege from Friday until Sunday, April 24, when Bertram and a small party appeared at Holdship's house to serve the warrant. The sheriff was admitted and Jackson, who had been hiding upstairs all this time, came down to talk with him. When Bertram read the warrant, Jackson expressed fears for his life, but the sheriff assured him that if he went quietly no harm would come to him. With stupendous credulousness, Jackson submitted. Bertram then dispersed the mob, and started down the road with his prisoner.

The sheriff had sent a man ahead to act as lookout and warn against any possible mob. The lookout's eyesight must have been calculatedly poor, for the group had gone only half a mile when an armed crowd reappeared and swarmed toward Jackson and the sheriff. In a moment Bertram and his party were overpowered—without resistance—and the Wright County mob had possession of Jackson. The sheriff and his men rode off. Bertram did not report the occurrence and made no attempt to interfere.

After taunting the helpless man all night, the lynchers strung Jackson up just as his wife

arrived to plead for his life. The leaders paid no attention to Mrs. Jackson but, in the sickening way that a cat plays with a mouse, hauled Jackson down and asked him if he had anything to say. He denied murdering Wallace and said he knew nothing about the missing watch, rifle, and blanket—the absence of which had annoyed the murdered man's brother and furnished the basis of the fraudulent arrest warrants.

This was not the answer the mob wanted. After sending Mrs. Jackson away, the men again hauled Jackson up, let him strangle once more for a moment, and brought him down. By that time his throat was so badly mangled that although he tried to speak, he could not. A sudden cry arose that a rescue party was on the way. The alarm was false, but the mob's leaders—who by now wanted to get the job done and over with—quickly strung Jackson up again, this time breaking his neck. The crowd then scattered, leaving the body hanging from a beam that projected from a gable of the late Henry Wallace's house. Thus Oscar Jackson died about 2:00 P.M. on April 25, 1859, on the site where his supposed victim had lived.

Of this cruel performance a Monticello correspondent wrote in the *Pioneer and Democrat* on April 28, 1859: "The people arose in their majesty and might, and executed the laws of our Commonwealth." A coroner's jury of local men, called on the day Jackson died, found that he had met his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown. The jury was not likely to accuse its own members.

While these events were taking place, Minnesota had been admitted to the Union on March 11, 1858. The state's first governor, Henry H. Sibley, was resolved that such lawlessness should not go unpunished. Calling the lynching a "high-handed outrage ... against the peace and dignity of the State," Sibley on April 29, 1859, offered a reward of five hundred dollars "for the apprehension and conviction of any or all persons concerned." The governor said that Jackson "was entitled to the protection of the laws, in common with every resident of the State, and all those who participated in the act which deprived him of life, or who aided or abetted it, should be severely punished." Alluding to the Rinehart case, the governor noted that "Once before ... the life of a human being was taken ... under similar circumstances, and the State disgraced thereby. These deeds of violence must cease," he said sternly, "or there will be no safety for life or property in our midst." No one ever claimed the reward, and the Jackson lynching might have drifted into obscurity had it not been for an implausible coincidence that revived the entire matter and brought it to the wildest phase of its spiral.²

On July 25, 1859, a short-lived fraternal order called the Sons of Malta was holding a celebration at Minnehaha Falls, a favorite scenic haunt near the infant city of Minneapolis. Among the visitors was Mrs. Jackson. While strolling the grounds, she saw Aymer Moore, who had sworn to the complaint which led to Jackson's final arrest and who had been among the lynching mob. Mrs. Jackson immediately notified John W. Crosby, St. Paul's chief of police, and by nightfall Moore was under arrest, charged with Jackson's murder.

As soon as Governor Sibley learned of Moore's arrest, he ordered the prisoner returned to Rockford to stand trial. To prevent further collusion among local officials, the governor directed Charles H. Berry, the state's attorney general, to conduct the prosecution in person.

Berry opened the preliminary examination at Monticello on July 31, 1859, with an angry mob swarming about the building, shouting and threatening the agents of law enforcement. Mrs. Jackson, testifying for the prosecution, clearly and unequivocally named the leaders of the lynching party and described the circumstances under which her husband died. When the Wright County sheriff took the stand to explain how the mob overwhelmed him and took Jackson from his custody, the attorney general found the sheriff's explanation so unsatisfactory that he ordered Bertram arrested and held as an accomplice in the lynching. Berry then discovered that certain prosecution witnesses had mysteriously disappeared before they could testify, and he was forced to adjourn the hearing before it had been in session a full day.

Where the witnesses had gone became clear that evening. About 9:00 P.M. a large, apparently well-organized crowd suddenly appeared and forcibly released Moore from his place of imprisonment. After threatening the attorney general's life and those of any other persons who dared inquire further into Jackson's death, the men rode off into the night.

The attorney general sped to St. Paul and reported to Governor Sibley that a Wright County mob had sabotaged proceedings in the very forum of justice and that county officials would do nothing about it. The act was a direct challenge to the state's authority. Could the executive power of Minnesota tolerate open revolt? Could the citizens of an organized government be allowed to ignore the law and defy the officials charged with its enforcement?

Governor Sibley thought not. On August 5, 1859, he issued a proclamation declaring Wright County "to be in a state of insurrection" in which its civil officers were "utterly powerless to execute the laws." The governor proclaimed: "For the first time in the history of Minnesota it has become the stern but melancholy duty of the Executive to employ a military force to suppress a combination against the laws in one of the counties of the State. Twice has an armed mob in Wright county outraged the public sentiment." He warned that "To assert the majesty of the law and to subdue the spirit of ruffianism which has thus manifested itself by overt acts, prompt measures will be taken."³

Before the day ended, Sibley ordered three state militia units to Wright County. At that time, Minnesota's armed forces were in theory composed of all the area's able-bodied men and were constantly prepared for action, but actually the militia existed chiefly on paper. Its units were little more than marching clubs made up of volunteers with fancy uniforms which they purchased themselves. Fortunately, the units Sibley ordered to active service—the Pioneer Guards, the St. Paul City Guards, and the Stillwater Guards—were somewhat better than that. (Three additional units—the St. Paul Light Cavalry Company, the Washington Light Artillery, and the Dakota Rifles—were placed on alert but were not ordered to the front.) Accompanying the soldiers to Wright County were thirty-five special policemen, among whom were Police Chief Crosby and the murdered man's father-in-law. John S. Prince, a St. Paul banker who was also a candidate for mayor of the city, commanded the expedition.

Although mobilization plans for these units are not preserved, it may be conjectured that the job of rounding up the soldiers, sobering them up, finding their uniforms and equipment, and shepherding them to the point of rendezvous, proved more complex than planning an

conducting the expedition. The three units marched away on August 6 in the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war. They were ordered to execute a three-pronged offensive proceeding by different routes to Wright County. Attorney General Berry reached Monticello on August 6 with the Pioneer Guards; the other military units attained their objective the following day.

On the surface they found everything calm, but the citizens' reactions to their arrival were varied. "Some for us," wrote Berry to Sibley on August 6, "but many more with alarm and hostility." W.J. Wheeler, the governor's secretary, who had accompanied the troops, reported to Sibley the same day that "people here sympathise with the Lynchers," who were nowhere to be found. They had fled to the woods, and local men showed the densest ignorance of where they had gone. Sheriff Bertram and I. R. Lawrence, Wright County attorney, refused outright to co-operate with Berry. Lawrence informed the attorney general that "there was an agreement by the people to do the harvesting" of the men sought by the troops "and to assist them in any manner necessary to keep them out of the way." He told Berry that the missing men "had taken shelter on the north side of the Mississippi," but he would not say where. Before night, Berry reported to Sibley, "it was apparent that all expectation of assistance from the Sheriff or the people of the County of Wright must be abandoned."⁴

Lawrence then indicated that the rioters would "voluntarily give themselves up to the authorities of the County" if Berry and the troops would not "interfere." The attorney general and Commander Prince agreed, but still the county officials did nothing. At this point Sibley himself started for Monticello to take personal charge. At that, the county officials, hoping to satisfy the governor, abruptly discovered three members of the rioters, arrested them, charged them with Jackson's murder, bound them over until the next grand jury should meet, and then released them on five-hundred-dollar bonds. One of the men so arrested and charged was Moore.

There was really nothing more for the militiamen to do. They had carried out their objective as far as they could. The arrest of Moore and the others gave formal satisfaction to the governor. When the military occupation of Wright County had continued for three days, jokes began to circulate about the war against phantoms—jokes which the opposition party might put to good use politically. Governor Sibley, never one to tolerate humor at the expense of his dignity, recalled the troops on August 10. But he warned the local officials that if they failed to execute the laws, he would again "interfere in such mode as I may deem expedient." The St. Paul units reached home on August 11 and staged a grand banquet complete with songs, toasts, and boasts. The Stillwater Guards got back on August 12. The legislature set the official duration of the war as August 6–14, 1859.⁵

Wright County, duly pacified and seemingly chastened, convened its grand jury on October 2. After considering the charges against Moore and the other two men accused of taking part in Jackson's hanging, the grand jury not surprisingly failed to indict any of them. They were discharged, and no one was ever punished for Jackson's death.

Time passed. In 1861–65 all the militia units involved in the Wright County War performed valorous service on the bloodier fields of the Civil War. In 1877, long after the Jackson affair

sample content of Murder in Minnesota

- [click What's in Your Genes?: From the Color of Your Eyes to the Length of Your Life, a Revealing Look at Your Genetic Traits pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [click Bankei Zen: Translations from the Record of Bankei](#)
- [click *Medical Biochemistry \(4th Edition\)*](#)
- [read Restraint](#)

- <http://fitnessfatale.com/freebooks/Bodyweight-Workouts-for-Men.pdf>
- <http://www.khoi.dk/?books/Die-Geister-der-CREST--Perry-Rhodan-Neo--Band-114--Die-Posbis--Band-4-.pdf>
- <http://reseauplatoparis.com/library/A-Woman-of-the-Iron-People.pdf>
- <http://www.gateaerospaceforum.com/?library/Restraint.pdf>