

“The Noonan Case”

in

HISTORY OF FILLMORE COUNTY, MINNESOTA

FOREWARD

by

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In the history of this state, the “Noonan Case” is not an important event. Except to the surviving families, it was forgotten long ago. The account of the assault, flight of the suspect, his decades-delayed apprehension, trial, and punishment is typical of descriptions of crimes that appear in volume after volume of county histories published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in this state. Short accounts of violent crimes were a feature of county historiography during these years.

We can speculate why early county historians could not resist telling the stories of crimes and their aftermaths. Without exception these early histories contained almanac-like lists of people, dates of events, meetings and elections, amounts of bonds for the erection of public buildings were noted; society was divided into categories such as “churches,” “banks,” “schools,” “bench and bar” and so on. And perhaps therein lies the answer to why the “Noonan Case” appeared in two histories of Fillmore County, the first published in 1882, the second in 1912: it added excitement and mystery to an otherwise dry chronology. Like many “true crime” stories today, these tales of crime on the frontier are entertaining. Moreover, from some of them, we can learn a lot.