



The City Council of Shakopee offered a \$1,000 reward for the capture of the guilty parties.

An inquest occurred, and several people were testified about the murder of John and Johanna O'Brien Spearman and their grandson, George Russell, who were murdered in their Shakopee farmhouse on or about the evening of Saturday, December 13, 1890.

Who did it? Some possibilities:

William Spearman? William was working as a hack driver for a livery stable. He had a reputation as being a heavy drinker, and was known about town as "Whiskey Bill."

Joseph? A clairvoyant, and her niece predicted that a man named Joseph did the deed.

Mr. Farr? Myrtle, a granddaughter, remembered a man who helped around the house. His last name was Farr.

O.S. "Red" Brown? Red Brown got some wood for a fence from John Spearman, and he never paid John Spearman back. They had some words, and Brown called John Spearman a son of a bitch.

Two men with an overcoat and a buffalo robe? Two men drove past his house fast towards Shakopee. One had a buffalo overcoat on, and the other one had an overcoat. The men were intoxicated.

A man dressed as a woman? A servant met a person between the church and the priest's residence, dressed in women's clothing, but looking like a man. He walked fast to her left, going in the opposite direction.



The triple funeral of John Spearman, Johanna O'Brien Spearman, and George Russell was held at St. Mary's Church on December 19, 1890.

They were buried at the Catholic Cemetery. No death certificates have been found. It might be that the certificates were overlooked in the sensationalism of the time.

The murders of Johanna, John, and George was never solved.



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**Joanna
O'Brien
Spearman**
ca. 1830-1890



Johanna O'Brien was born in Ireland ca. 1830, and arrived in Boston on May 24, 1848 on the ship Brig Lively. Her future husband, John Spearman was born in Ireland ca. 1820, and moved from Canada in the 1840s and then to Minnesota Territory.

John and Johanna married in America.

In 1854, the Spearman's settled in Chanhassen on 92 acres beside Lake Riley. Johanna and John were Catholic and attended St. Mark's and St. Mary's Catholic Churches in Shakopee. In fact, Johanna was baptized in 1872 by Fr. Gregory Koering.

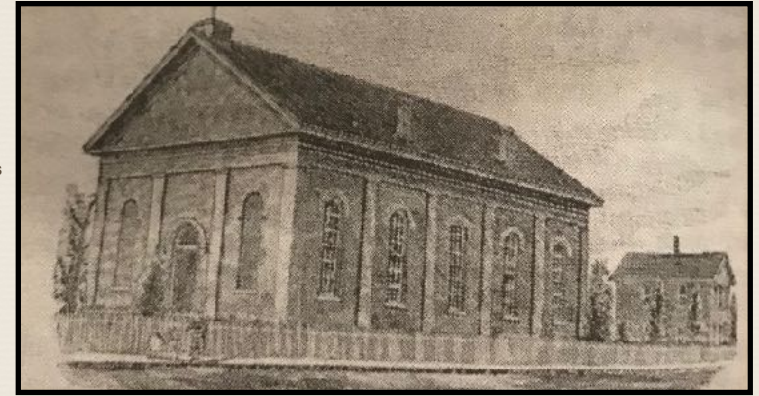
The Spearman's had 11 children: Anne, John, Ellen, Bridget, Mary, Katherine, Jenny, William, Margaret, and Peter and John who died in childhood.

John and Johanna were successful at farming. In July 1860, an Agricultural Census found that they had: 8 acres of improved land/ 84 acres of unimproved land, Cash value of farm = \$500/Value of farm implements = \$30, 3 milch cows, 2 working oxen, 4 other cattle, 6 swine, Indian corn in bushels = 160, Irish potatoes in bushels = 139, Butter in pounds = 200, Hay in tons = 6, Value of animals slaughtered = \$40.



John and Johanna O'Brien Spearman with their first 3 children: Maggie, William, and John.

On right is St. Mary's Catholic Church in Shakopee, where George was an altar server.



On October 1, 1877, John and Johanna purchased Block No. 106, Lots 1 through 10, in Shakopee. They paid \$1,200.

They built a farmhouse, 1 1/2 stories high, at the edge of town. The location is between 8th Avenue and Shakopee Avenue, and between Spencer and Sommerville Street. The house had a kitchen, parlor, two bedrooms, and a back porch. The house was situated in the center of the block. On the homestead included a barn and a chicken coop.

In 1890, the Spearman's had one cow, some hens, and a cat. John Spearman walked his cow to the Minnesota River daily to be watered. The retired couple were quiet people who kept to themselves. They wore homespun, unstylish clothing. Johanna was seen in public on Sundays, where she attended mass at St. Mary's Catholic Church. The couple were described as industrious, economical to the point of penuriousness, and miserly. John Spearman paid for all for his purchases in cash.

When Anne Spearman Russell Lynch, the eldest daughter, was widowed in 1880, she left California and returned to Shakopee with her 3 children and stayed with her parents.



Georgie, who was 2 years old, was loved by the grandparents, and when Anne moved to Minneapolis to marry again, Georgie stayed in Shakopee. George Russell helped with the horses around the farm, and helped with correspondences since the grandparents were illiterate.

George was an altar boy at St. Mary's. But one Sunday in December of 1890, the family was not at mass. The church members went to their house. John Spearman was sitting in front of the kitchen stove, with a bullet hole in the back of his head. The people of Shakopee continued into the house, and saw Johanna O'Brien Spearman, who was lying in a pool of blood on the parlor floor. And in the other bedroom lay George, age 12, dead beneath the bed where he hid.

Nothing was touched. Two certificates of deposit were on the table. It was not a robbery.

The murder had taken place several days ago. The famished cat had eaten several of Johanna O'Brien Spearman and John's fingers.

The chickens had starved to death. The cow was so weak that it had to be killed.

