



SHAKOPEE HERITAGE SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER



It was around 3 p.m. on July 28th. I had parked my car, and was taking out the tables and materials for the Shakopee Heritage Society for the Rhythm on the Rails concert that night. As I looked up to the sky, I noticed a helicopter circling around just a few blocks from the concert venue on 2nd and Lewis Street in downtown.

A few people told me that there was a murder on 4th and Spencer Street. And that America Mafalda Thayer was killed, her head cut off. I thought about Shakopee. I thought of the Spencer's, whose family enslaved people before they moved to Holmes Landing (page 3). I thought of Mahala Conklin Shumway and her mother (page 4 and 5). And I thought of the murders that happened on Spencer Street in 1890 (page 6 & 7). And I thought we, the people of Shakopee, are better than that. Remember our past, and keep Shakopee safe for all.

-David R. Schleper

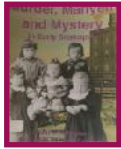


Presentations and Events



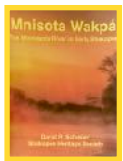
September 14, 2021, 1-2 pm at Shakopee Community Center

“We Were Smart!” Even More Women in Early Shakopee



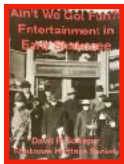
October 12, 2021, 1-2 pm at Shakopee Community Center

Murder, Mayhem, and Mystery in Early Shakopee



November 16, 2021, 1-2 pm at Shakopee Community Center

Mnisota Wakpá: The Minnesota River in Early Shakopee



December 14, 2021, 1-2 pm at Shakopee Community Center

Ain't We Got Fun?! Entertainment in Early Shakopee



January 11, 2022, 1-2 pm at Shakopee Community Center.

Instigate, Inflamm, and Ignite! Fires in Early Shakopee



Membership Meeting

Saturday, Oct. 23, 2021 12 noon to 2 pm at Shakopee Library
Shakopee Heritage Society General Meeting

Presentation on 44 Years at Valleyfair by Tom Suel, Directory of Maintenance and Construction



Taste of Shakopee Family FUNday and Business Expo
 Saturday, August 14 10-4 pm
 Huber Park
 Fillmore St. N.
 Shakopee, MN 55379



Scott County Senior Expo at Twin Oaks Middle School
 Friday, October 22, 2021
 15860 Fish Point Road
 Prior Lake, MN 55372



A display from the Shakopee Heritage Society at the Rhythm on the Rails concerts in July and August 2021. Thanks for the support of Billy Wermerskirchen and Bill's Toggery.

The Spencer's

- Spier Spencer was born in Elizabethtown, Spencer County, Kentucky, on January 22, 1827. His family enslaved people in Kentucky.
- In 1849, accompanied by his brother went West and located at St. Paul when that city was still a small village. They worked as carpenters there until 1853. On November 16, 1853, Spier married Rose Ann Spencer at Traverse de Sioux. Rose Ann Spencer and Spier Spencer were cousins.
- Spier and Rose Ann sold their farm and moved to Shakopee in 1853. He purchased 1/3 of the town of Shakopee from Thomas Holmes and David L. Fuller. It cost him \$4100. He may have used money from his family selling enslaved people in Kentucky.
- Spier Spencer opened a general store in Shakopee and traded in produce and furs with the Indians. In 1855 he built a home on the site later known as the Major Strait farm. He had a side business in 1861 owning and operating a steamboat, Clara Hinds, on the Minnesota River.
- In the fall of 1862 a kernel of wheat struck Spier in the eye and caused inflammation, resulting in total blindness in one eye. Spier then bought a home of Second Street, and opened a private boarding house known as the Union Home. Later he mastered the trade of broom-making and supplied local stores and communities until 1895, when he retired.
- Spier Spencer passed away on January 26, 1907 and was buried at Valley Cemetery in East Shakopee. His wife (and cousin) Rose Ann Spencer Spencer, died on October 5, 1913 and was buried next to his husband.



A lot of people remember Benjamin Emerson Shumway, who helped build the Holmes Trading Post, and whose name is on a street sign in Shakopee.

But just as important is his wife, Mahala Conklin Shumway (1835-1909).

History books never mentioned her name. They called her a servant, or wrote "...a servant girl, M— — — — Conklin."

Mahala Conklin Shumway was born in Ohio, and moved with her family to Iowa. Mahala was one of 15 children of William Conklin and Easter Ackley Conklin who lived in Lytle's Creek in Farmers Creek township in Iowa.

Before too long, Mahala moved to Minnesota Territory.

William Conklin, Mahala's father, was a rough man and had the reputation of being a hard drinker. Easter Ackley Conklin, Mahala's mother, was "a large muscular woman of the amazonian type" according to the **History of Jackson County, Iowa** (1879). Chicago, IL: Western Historical Society., p. 231-232.

On October 1, 1856, William Conklin, Mahala's father, had been murdered by his wife, Easter, assisted by Mahala's brothers, Aminadab and Elijah. While Mahala's brothers held him down, her mother cut his head off!

Tom Conklin, Mahala's younger brother, who could not talk well, told the sheriff, "Mindadab held dad by the hair while mam cut his throat."

The witnesses, with one exception, were members of the Conklin's family, or related to the Conklin's. Their evidence made it appear that the old lady was acting in self-defense when she struck the fatal blow.

The jury acquitted Easter, Aminadab, and move north to St. Paul, and later to Holmes

Elijah. Mahala was smart enough to Landing!



Mahala worked starting in 1851 as a servant Holmes Street.) Later it became Beren's De-Block. Then she worked as a servant of William and dan.

at Hayward shanty (on First Street and partment Store and now is H&R Susana Shook Holmes in Jor-

Kohl's and Beren's Store



William and Susana Shook Holmes



Benjamin Emerson Shumway got smallpox in the fall of 1852. After recovery, he moved to St. Paul, where Mahala and Emerson married on June 7, 1853.

In 1859, Shumways crossed the plains with an ox team. They engaged in prospecting and mining in California and Nevada for 10 years. They ran a stock ranch for 20 years.

Mahala Conklin Shumway, along with Benjamin Emerson Shumway and their two sons and two daughters lived on an isolated ranch in the mountains in California. Benjamin, along with their eldest son, headed out for several days, engaging in bringing the herd of cattle down from the high ranges. While Benjamin and his son, Emerson were away, a band of Northern Paiute Indians stole down to the ranch one night and left with all of the horses except a few that were near the house.

The Northern Paiute were fast, and quiet, and so Mahala and her children did not discover the theft until day-break. Upset at the loss of the fine horses, Mahala directed her daughters to prepare provisions, while the young son gathered the remaining horses and got ready the rifles and ammunition. With Mahala in the lead, they headed out. The three woman and a young boy headed up the trail, with a goal of recovering their property.

Mahala Conklin Shumway and children traveled all day, and at night camped in the mountains, arising at day-break to resume the hunt. All day they followed the tracks, and at dusk approached, they saw the smoke of a campfire. Mahala ordered the horses tethered. With caution, the Shumway's crept toward the camp. Keeping to cover, they spied on the Northern Paiute, and recognized the band of horses as theirs.

The Northern Paiute, who call themselves Numa, or the people, traditionally have lived in the Great Basin in eastern California, southwestern Idaho, western Nevada, and southeast Oregon. The Northern Paiute's pre-contact lifestyle was well adapted to the harsh desert environment in which they lived.

But Mahala Conklin Shumway was angry. The Northern Paiute had stolen her horses. Mahala and her children crept to within rifle range of the six Northern Paiute and hid behind the rocks. Mahala whispered to her children to wait until all of the Indians were in view. And then she told them to fire their weapons. The four rifles of Mahala and her three children slammed into four of the Paiute, who fell down dead. The other two Indians went to grab their guns, but the Shumway's shot again, killing the last two Northern Paiute.

According to the Shumways, mountain justice had been done.

Two days later the party arrived back home with their stock. But not only did they have the horses, but also six scalps of the Northern Paiute Indians, who were set out on the fence posts as a warning to others.

Sounds like Mahala must have learned from her mother. The apple does not fall far from the tree!



Benjamin Emerson Shumway and Mahala Conklin Shumway

The Murders on 8th and Spencer Street



John and Johanna O'Brien Spearman were Catholic, and attended both St. Mark's and St. Mary's, even while residing in Chanhassen in 1854. They had 11 children.

On October 1, 1877, with the family raised, John and Johanna Spearman purchased Block No. 106, Lots 1 through 10, in Shakopee. They paid \$1,200, and they built a farmhouse there. This is on 8th and Spencer Street today. The property in Shakopee was comprised of ten lots, or a city block. It was at the edge of town in 1877. The farmhouse was 1 ½ stories high, with a kitchen, parlor, two bedrooms, and a back porch. The house was situated in the center of the block. Other buildings 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.

Picture of John and Johanna O'Brien Spearman with their first 3 children: Maggie, William, and in the front is John.



The retiring couple were quiet people who kept to themselves. The couple wore homespun, unstylish clothing, and did not attract attention. Johanna O'Brien Spearman was apparently seen in public only on Sundays, when she regularly attended church at St. Mary's.

The couple were described as industrious, economical to the point of penuriousness, and miserly. They were apparently living in simple, yet comfortable, circumstances. John Spearman paid for all of his purchases in cash.

When Anne Spearman Russell Lynch, their eldest daughter, was widowed in 1880, she left California and returned to Shakopee with her three young children to stay with her parents. John and Johanna fell in love with the youngest son, Georgie, who was 2 years old. When Anne subsequently moved to Minneapolis and married her second husband, her parents asked to keep the boy and raise him. Georgie helped with the chores around the farm, and he helped with the correspondence, since John and Johanna were illiterate.

George Russell attended school regularly, and was also an altar boy at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Shakopee.

In December 1890, the John Spearman family was not at St. Mary's Church for mass on Sunday. A few neighbors went to their house, which is where Spencer and 8th Street intersect today. They found John Spearman sitting in front of the kitchen stove...with a bullet hole in the back of his head. His wife was lying in a pool of blood on the parlor floor. Spearman 12-year-old grandson lay dead beneath a bed upstairs.

The murder had taken place several days ago because a famished cat had chewed off several of Mr. and Mrs. Spearman's fingers. The domestic animals and chickens had starved to death, and the cow was so weak it had to be killed.

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

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

The three family members were buried at the Catholic Cemetery on December 20, 1890. The large Spearman stone is shaped like a cross and is near the entrance, with the words "George F. Russell" facing the entrance, and "Spearman" on the side. The smaller stones below are marked as George, Mother, Father, and John. (John was the eldest son who died at age 22.)

No death certificates have been found for John and Johanna Spearman or George Russell. It seemed that there was some difficulty in determining the exact date of death. They also did not have a delayed death certificate. The certificates were overlooked in the sensationalism of the time.

And the murder of John Spearman, Johanna O'Brien Spearman, and George Russell was never solved.



Shakopee Heritage Society
2109 Boulder Pointe
Shakopee, MN 55379
President: David R. Schleper

Past-President: Lois Wendt **Vice-President:** Corky Mars
Treasurer: Melissa Whiting **Book Keeper:** Jody Brennen
Secretary: Donna Lane **Trustees:** Liz Lundin

Talk to Us!

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Web: **shakopeeheritage.org**
Email: **newsletter@shakopeeheritage.org**
Phone: **952-693-3865**



“Old photos are gifts from the past, opening a frozen moment.”
-Faris Cassell. In *“The Unanswered Letter: One Holocaust Family’s Desperate Plea for Help.”* This is a Birthday Party at St. Francis Home ca. 1950.