

Lavina Van Horn Noekler



I was completing some photo requests of graves in Nevada Cemetery in Wyandot County, Ohio and this was one of the photos I took. When I returned home and started to upload the pictures to their respective Find A Grave memorials, I was shocked at the tragic story buried beneath this unassuming marker. The following account appeared in the Crawford County Forum on July 13, 1883:

A TERRIBLE AFFAIR

*Mistaken for a Burglar and Shot Dead.
Distressing Tragedy in Dallas Township.*

At an early hour this morning the city was filled with rumors concerning what was variously reported as an accident and a murder in Dallas township. In order to secure the facts, a commissioner of the Forum visited the scene, and gleaned the details of one of the most unfortunate incidents in the history of the county. The locality is what is commonly known as the "Shay farm", on the Grass Run road, seven

miles and a half southwest of the city. Here, in a neat story and a half frame house, in a shaded room, surrounded by sorrowing relatives and friends, clad in the habiliments of death, rested the remains of Lavina Noecker, an aged lady, the victim of a distressing mistake. The family yesterday consisted of Mrs. Noecker, her husband Benjamin, her son-in-law, Frank P. Dick, and his wife, and Leonard Swartz, from whom the farm is rented, and who boarded with the family. Dick and his wife occupied the north bedroom on the ground floor, and the old couple slept in a room on the same floor at the south end of the building.

Last night, about eleven o'clock, Mrs. Dick awakened her husband with the remark that she heard someone in the back yard. The latter, suspicious of burglars for the reason that he had recently received a considerable amount of money, sprang from his bed and started to investigate.

Standing at right angles to the main building is an addition, used for culinary purposes. Leading from this kitchen to the yard is a door which is ordinarily fastened on the inside by a hook. As Dick passed through the yard he noticed that the door was unfastened, but thought nothing especially of the circumstance, as it might have been forgotten when the family retired. After exploring the yard with reasonable thoroughness, and discovering no one, Dick returned to the house and his bed, fastening the door after him.

Soon after he was again aroused by some one endeavouring to open the kitchen door. A window opens from Dick's bed room within perhaps ten feet of the door where the attempt was being made, the walls of the building forming an "L." This window was raised, but the outside blinds were closed. Dick stepped to the window and asked "Who's there?" at the same time turning the slats and peering as best he could into the intense darkness outside. No answer was returned, which can be accounted for by Mrs. Noecker being very deaf and unable to hear the inquiry.

Dick, not desiring to be alone in what promised to be a contest with a burglar, called to his father-in-law, and also awakened Swartz, who slept in an upper room. The former responded hurriedly, and in his haste failed to notice the absence of his wife from his side. He came into the room of Dick, and the two noted that the efforts to open the door continued. Dick again went to the window and again demanded to know who was there. Again there was no response, but he saw through the darkness a figure approach, but was unable to tell whether it was a man or a woman, even had he had the slightest suspicion that it was the latter.

As the figure approached, Dick reached for a shot gun that was standing in the corner of the room, and opening the shutter far enough for the muzzle to protude, fired. The victim fell dead, without even so much as a groan. Realizing that the shot had been fatal, the family opened the door, when, to their indiscrivable horror and grief they discovered the terrible mistake. There upon the the step lay, weltering in the life blood that welled from a terrible wound in her left breast, the wife and mother. She was dead, and had evidently been killed instantly, perhaps without the knowledge of being injured.

The gun was loaded with bird shot, and the charge took effect in the left breast, immediately above the heart, and ranging downward pierced that organ. The distance was not more than six feet, ant the wound was terrible in its nature. The neighborhood was at once aroused, and during the night numbers arrived and offered their sympathies and services to the stricken family.

Coroner Houseburg was notified at an early hour in the morning, and visited the scene, where, after hearing the statements of the members of the family, each of which corroborated the other, he decided not to hold an inquest. The relations of the household were shown to have been unusually pleasant, and all the evidence showed clearly that the affair was the result of a terrible mistake.

The family have been occupants of the farm only since October, having at that time removed to it from Shelby, Richland county. They are honest, hardworking people, not perhaps well provided with worldly goods, but of a peculiarly quiet but earnest disposition, having by their energy and neighborly qualities rapidly made friends among the farmers of the community.

The victim was in her sixty-sixth year, and possessed of many traits of motherly thoughtfulness for the welfare of her children. Dick and his wife have been married less than a year.

Lavina Van Horn Noecker was born December 28, 1817 in Pennsylvania. She married Benjamin Noecker on July 30, 1844 and became the step-mother to his three daughters, Elizabeth, Mary A, and Harriet. Lavina and Benjamin had five children of their own: Rebecca Ellen, Sarah A., Isaac, Lavina, and Catharine. She died on July 12, 1883.