

Kearney Daily Hub – Jan. 8, 1900

NELSON WAS MURDERED

Remains of Missing an Found on His Own farm

Killed by His Oldest Son

S. A. Grant and Nelson's Wife Before Coroner's Jury

The mystery surrounding the disappearance of C. M. Nelson, on the fifteenth day of November has been solved.

At the time it was generally believed that he had left home, about five miles northwest of the city, and committed suicide by drowning in the cotton mill lake. Nelson was an eccentric, rough character, did not have many friends, and his disappearance did not cause a great stir at the time.

As time passed, however, and "the sea did not give up its dead," and nothing was heard from the missing man, Sheriff Funk organized a searching party which was referred to briefly in a paragraph in the Hub last Saturday. For convenience we give below the story of the search as told by the Kearney correspondent of the Omaha Bee.

Story of the Search

Kearney, Neb., Jan. 8 – Another tragedy was unearthed last night when the headless body of C. M. Nelson, a Swedish farmer who lived eight miles northwest of Kearney, was found in a ravine 200 yards southeast of his barn underneath a pile of straw and dirt. Besides the head, one arm was also missing.

Mention was made about two months ago of the disappearance of C. M. Nelson. At this time it was generally believed that he had left his home to return to Sweden but things which have since transpired led Sheriff Funk to the belief that he had met with foul play. Saturday the sheriff went to Nelson's farm and secured the assistance of 20 farmers and began a hunt for the remains. In a straw barn attached to an old frame barn and built since the disappearance soft earth was discovered, and the parties at once began to dig, expecting to unearth the body.

When about two feet below the surface an old hat with a long cut in the back was turned up, together with a large shell-shaped bone. The bone was thought by many to come from some large animal, but Sheriff Funk stuck it and the hat in his pocket and as it was growing late the search was abandoned for the day and the party returned to town.

The bone dug up was taken to a doctor, who at once pronounced it a portion of a human skull. The search was renewed and the body found, as stated above. Last night the youngest of Nelson's three children said his brother Theodore, aged 21 years, had done the killing.

When Theodore was told that his brother had given him away he acknowledged that he had committed the crime. He said he had hit his father on the head with a pitchfork, one blow killing him. He then tied a rope around his feet, hitched a horse to the body and pulled it over the hill and down into the draw, where it was found.

The belief is general that the crime was committed with an ax and that the boy also cut off the head and arm.

Nelson was nearly 60 years old and was living with his second wife, who was barely 20. He parted with his first wife a few years ago, they dividing all property, both real and personal. It is said that Nelson was very brutal in his treatment of his sons, and the night he disappeared a neighbor saw him knock down his youngest son with a club and then start for the older one. It was probably this trouble that caused Nelson's death.

The son who did the killing is under arrest, as is also a man named Grant, an uncle of the murdered man's wife. Mrs. Nelson is also under arrest.

Jan 9 – Coroner's Jury

Jan. 11 – Theodore arraigned, pleads not guilty, reported to be not to mentally bright

Jan. 16 – Elmer arrested, released on bond

Jan. 19 – Fin de Cycle literary society debated whether Theodore Nelson should get death penalty or life in prison. They decided on life in prison

Jan. 27 – Theodore charged, rehash of story

Jan. 31 – Lawyers ask that 3 doctors examine Theodore

Feb. 17 – Case not called, no physicians report yet

Feb. 23 – To be an estate sale of C M Nelsons household goods, equipment and stock

March 3 – Theodore described as dull and unconcerned as he waits in jail

March 13 – Only person left in jail is young Nelson

March 29 – Drs. Reported Theodore to be sane but moved by suggestion rather than rationality and deduction. Recommended he be charged with manslaughter rather than murder.

Apr. 2 – Adjourned Jan. court term was to have been opened but will not till Wed. Unknown if Nelson would plead guilty to manslaughter

Apr. 6 – He did, got 7 yrs. Judge said penitentiary was not proper place for him but there was no place else he could be legally be placed.

Apr 7 – Hub supported judge's position

Apr. 23 – Taken by train to Lincoln

Jan 9, 1901 – Segrid Nelson had returned home to Sweden and was living with her mother near Lindkoping. She sent for her marriage certificate and husband's death certificate to be notarized by the Swedish consulate in Chicago and sent on to Sweden so she can become a Swedish subject and member of the Lutheran church there.

Nov. 19, 1906 – Theodore Nelson, who has been in Omaha the past six years has returned to Kearney and will make his home with his mother, Mrs. Christina Nelson, 1518 Ave. C

Kearney Cemetery

Nelson, C. M., lot 427, space 1, east section, died 11/15/1899, buried 1/10/1900, age 51, cause of death: murdered, owner of lot: Cigriel Nelson

Marriage Licenses

Charles M. Nelson, 45, born Sweden, divorced three years ago

Father: F. Nelson

Mother: Eva Lawton

Segrid E Frederickson, 20, born Sweden

Married 22 December 1898 by the county judge

Probate Record

Charles M Nelson

Died on or about Nov. 5, 1899 at his home in Riverdale Township

About Theodore - Hub Wed., Aug 6, 1890

Story of Theodore Nelson, 12, herding cattle near the Industrial School, reported he was kidnapped Sunday and locked in a barn until yesterday morning without food or water. The sheriff went out with the boy to try to find where he was held, couldn't find it. He went out with father this morning and still couldn't find it. He thinks he was taken 4-5 miles west making it about 10 miles from Kearney. The sheriff has suspicions about two drunks who were spoiling for excitement Saturday night.