

## **Nathaniel Carnagy**

### **The only thing we know for sure about Nathaniel Carnagy is that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time**

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He moved to Marion late in 1846. In early 1847, he was murdered. Nathaniel Carnagy will forever be known as Linn County's first murder victim. The murder may have been the best thing that ever happened to Carnagy - from a purely historical perspective, of course. Otherwise, there would be little, if anything, about his life in the local history books.

One cannot tell what he might have accomplished later in life had he survived, but there are no indications that he was anything but a farmer or laborer. Probably hardworking. Quite possibly a good father. But about the only thing we know for sure about him was that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Nathaniel Carnagy is one of the mysteries in Marion history.

As with anything else of passing interest that occurred at that time, some guesses have to be made about the circumstances of Carnagy's death.

According to one written account, on March 20, 1847, a man by the name of James Reed had spent much of his day drinking heavily. He came upon Carnagy and remembered that Carnagy owed him some money (whether he did or not is unknown). It was a feud that had been going on for some time, and Reed, having grown quarrelsome, "indulged in abusive language." When Carnagy retired to a tavern - most likely just north of today's Marion Square park, or possibly to the west - Reed followed and clubbed him over the head several times with a chunk of wood. Carnagy died of the injuries several weeks later, on April 3.

This was the "old days" of Marion, with a population of about 400 people. But there was an attempt to apply justice. Not only did Linn County have its first official murder, it had its first murder trial. Reed was arrested and, at the June term of the county court, indicted. A trial was postponed until the following April, however. At that time, a jury of his peers - all men selected off the street - declared Reed not guilty.

When Carnagy died in 1847, he was 36. He left his wife, Elizabeth, and, at least

two sons. All are buried in Marion's Oak Shade Cemetery, where the sons rest near their father's grave. One son is Henry; the other is Frank (Benj. Frank on the gravestone), who himself offers a bit of a mystery.

Frank's grave marker shows his Civil War unit. There are many others in Oak Shade who fought in the Civil War, many of them with distinguished records. (There are even a dozen veterans of the War of 1812 buried there.) But Frank Carnagy's marker information is unusual in that it says he fought for the 65th New York Infantry.

According to Joyce Parks, a Marion historian and co-chair of the Swamp Fox Cemetery Committee for this year's celebration, she has not been able to discover why he was with a New York unit during the war.

Parks speculates that he was with an Iowa unit so devastated with losses that it was absorbed into the New York unit, but so far there has been no proof - another mystery for the Carnagy family.

Frank, who was just 6 when his father was murdered, died in 1865, a year after he returned from the Civil War. His mother, Elizabeth, is not so easily found in the cemetery.

In a separate section of Oak Shade is a large red granite marker with the names of Charles and Elizabeth Foulk. According to Parks, records from Murdoch Funeral Home show that Elizabeth Foulk was previously Mrs. Nathaniel Carnagy. She was still known as "Liz Carnagy" when she buried her son, Frank, in 1865. But later in life she appears to have married Charles Foulk. The stone indicates Foulk was born in 1815 and died in 1884, but there are no obituary records for him. Elizabeth Foulk died in 1893.

For most of the grave markers in Oak Shade, it is not difficult to find the same last name on other markers close by. Not Foulk; the red granite marker is the solitary evidence of the name.

Another puzzle that surrounds the tale of Nathaniel Carnagy is the spelling of his name. Most of the official records of his life - or more precisely, his death - and the resulting historic accounts all spell his name Carnagy. That is not what his grave marker shows, however. Carved into the granite is, very clearly, Carnagey.

Either a careless recordkeeper more than a century ago CARNAGY: TO PAGE 19 CARNAGY: FROM PAGE 18 doomed Marion's first murder victim to having one of the few records of his existence be an inaccurate one - or a tombstone engraver made a mistake and his family either could not afford a new one or did not find the error to be that significant.

The stone that shows where Linn County's first murder victim lies carries a final footnote. The fading letters across the top of the marker form: "Died In Peace In Heaven." Yet it is known that his death was not a peaceful one.

Perhaps there was a message there that he was a peaceful man undeserving of the fate he found. Or perhaps it was nothing more than an attempt at family comfort.

What then became of Carnagy's accused murderer, James Reed, is just another part of the incident's mystery. There is one other reference to a James Reed that may or not have been the same man.

Thirteen years after the murder, in 1860, the "Great Tornado" devastated a huge area around Marion. According to the written accounts in the book "History of Linn County," it originated "far to the west," passed through Linn County, and went off into Illinois. The tornado struck Linn County about six miles west of town on a Sunday evening and stayed on the ground through Mount Vernon. A number of homes were destroyed, including one owned by James Reed. The upper story of the new brick house was blown off and one wall fell off the foundation. The 15-member family was saved by Reed, who herded the family into the storm cellar just as the storm hit.

Parks acknowledges that little is known about frontier families such as the Carnagys, but as others share what they know about Marion's past, the stories do become clearer.