

Bicentennial Moment #7 - Livingston County's first hanging

On Friday, July 9, 1858 at exactly 21 minutes past 3:00 P.M. the first execution in Livingston County took place on the side lawn between the Courthouse and the Jail in Geneseo.

Isaac I. Wood of Dansville was convicted of administering arsenic to his brother David J. Wood in 1855. Isaac's motive was to gain access to his brother's bank account. David's wife, Rhoda, and their two children were out of town when David died suddenly with Isaac at his side. Upon learning of her husband's death, Rhoda returned and soon she and the two children became sick. Isaac had poisoned them as well. The children recovered but their mother died. Locals suspected foul play but didn't have the evidence to indict Isaac.

After leaving the area, Isaac's wife died in a similar fashion as his brother and sister-in-law. Finally, after the bodies of his victims were exhumed and a chemical analysis was done, the serial killer was arrested, tried, convicted, and hung before an audience of curiosity seekers who came to witness the gruesome historical event.

Only two other hangings occurred in Livingston County. Henry Wilson, a notorious hardened criminal, went to the gallows in 1865 and William Pierson, who poisoned his victim, faced the same fate in 1880. The salacious details of all three hangings made national news and left an indelible mark on the county's past.

