

Fruitport has a historical society and everyone is invited to help

by Mary Weimer

The first meeting of the new Fruitport Historical Society was held on June 25 at the Fruitport Branch of the Muskegon Area District Library.

A July meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, July 30 at Burger Crest beginning at 7 p.m. The meeting is open to anyone interested in preserving the history of the Fruitport area.

The gun fight in Pomona Park

(This day in history — August 22, 1875)

By Brian Zwart

Many, if not all people familiar with history, can easily tell the story of Wyatt Earp and his brothers' famous gunfight at the O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona. For those unfamiliar with the history behind the actual event, perhaps the Kevin Costner or Kurt Russell renditions may ring a bell. What you may not know is that Fruitport was home to a gunfight of its own, one that occurred on August 22, 1875; six years prior to the famous western shootout.

It was a quiet Sunday morning in Fruitport when a stranger drifted into town with a friend, and they began frequenting the local watering holes due to their immense thirst. His name was James Hogan, and he is described as being in his early 20s, six feet tall, with dark features and dark curly hair. Hogan's friend is known only as Vanderberg. After spending the day drinking and loitering, when evening began to fall, the pair had something else on their minds. What their intentions were is unclear, but they approached the home of Henry Switzer and attempted to enter the residence. Fruitport had a population of about 400 in 1875, and Henry Switzer is mentioned in the *Muskegon County Directory*, so he must have been someone of influence, since only a few dozen of the Fruitport residents are named in the directory. Switzer, faced with two strangers, obviously refused to let them in. Here, two different accounts are related, one saying that Hogan, angry at Switzer for refusing to let them come in, drew a revolver from his pocket, kicked in the door, and began shooting inside the house. The other account has Hogan shooting through the closed door. Either way, bullets were flying through the house, and Henry Switzer narrowly escaped death when a bullet buzzed past his head, which singed his hair. Switzer slipped out the back door during the melee and made fast for the Pomona House.

On his way, he ran into two gentlemen out for an evening stroll, Fruitport native Seth Crippen and William H. Wyman. Wyman was in town visiting the Pomona House. He was 35 at the time, and was a police officer back in Chicago. In a panic, Switzer alerted the two men of the situation, and they headed for his house to confront the two attackers. On the way, Hogan and Vanderberg appeared, and when they were close enough to Switzer, Hogan swung his fist and struck Switzer square in the face. Hogan immediately drew his revolver, being quick on the draw. Wyman, too, drew a similar pistol and the two men began firing at near point-blank range. A total of ten shots were fired, four from Wyman and six from Hogan. As the two danced around each other, dodging bullets, Officer Wyman was wounded in the left elbow, and Hogan was seriously wounded in the right forearm.

It is nothing short of amazing that neither man was killed or none of the flying bullets hit an innocent bystander that was in the area. But the brief firefight was enough to send Hogan and Vanderberg fleeing towards the Fruitport docks, where the steamer *Dwight Cutler* was just shoving off for Grand Haven. The criminals jumped aboard the vessel and lay low, thinking they had escaped. However, technology was working against the men, because while they were steaming down Spring Lake, Officer Wyman was telegraphing Ottawa County Sheriff Wollman, who was waiting at the docks when the boat arrived. Both men were arrested and taken to the Muskegon County Jail awaiting trial. While the fate of Vanderberg is unknown, James Hogan was found guilty of attempted robbery and manslaughter. He was sentenced to five years' hard labor at the Michigan State Prison.

Vanderberg must not have been too close a friend with Hogan, because after his capture, he was questioned and he seemingly sang like a canary. He admitted that he and Hogan had recently escaped from jail in Saugatuck a few days earlier. It would seem that Vanderberg was sent back there after the ordeal, since he is not mentioned in the newspapers with Hogan while standing trial. It is also unknown what offense the pair committed to land them in jail in the first place. With only a last name, Vanderberg is almost impossible to track. Hogan is equally as difficult to track, because it seems like every town in Michigan had a James Hogan, or two or three. Also, if he was leading a life of crime, he most likely would not sit down and fill out the census form that was required by law. Another James Hogan was in Cincinnati in 1869, and he was involved in many licentious acts such as drunken brawling, assault and battery, and illegal gambling. Whether this is a younger James Hogan who started shooting up Fruitport is unclear, but it adds to the man's character and makes the story of the day he came to Fruitport a little more interesting.



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