Hannah Munson

Clan Hannah

Tuttle Murder, Mayhem, and Madness

by Lori Hahn

This tale is of one of the two daughters of Capt Thomas Munson, Hannah Munson. She married into the storied Tuttle family of Massachusetts.



Hannah was the youngest child of Capt Thomas Munson, one of the earliest citizens of the New Haven Colony and a signator of the Fundamental Agreement of the New Haven Colony signed in 1639 and 1640. Hannah's future father-in-law, immigrant William Tuttle was also a signator.

On 02 May 1667, Joseph Tuttle married Hannah in New Haven. His parents, William and Elizabeth, had come from England in 1635 on the ship Planter. I'm not quite sure Hannah knew what she was getting into marrying into this family, but she had at least nine children by Joseph. Joseph came from a large family, including sisters Mercy, Elizabeth, and brother Benjamin.

Hannah's brother-in-law Benjamin got into a huge argument with his older sister Sarah, wife of John Slauson, on 17 Nov 1676. Benjamin shouted at her about her behavior from years before when Sarah and a young man were fined for kissing by the local magistrate. The story was somewhat longer, but it was scandalous to touch each other and oh, my goodness, kiss in those Puritan days. Was it a temper tantrum or madness that caused Benjamin to grab an ax and strike his sister until she was dead? Sarah left a baby girl and a bereft husband. Benjamin was tried and executed on 16 Jun 1677.

Sister Elizabeth married Richard Edwards in 1667. It is reported that the couple was fined because their first child arrived before the requisite nine months. The couple had many more children but after 20 years of marriage, Richard began to plan on a divorce. He apparently discovered the first child was not his. He filed divorce and it was granted. Elizabeth was said to have gone mad and disappeared from the area, whereabouts and disposition unknown.

Mercy had married Samuel Brown of Wallingford in 1667 and they had children, included Samuel Brown, Jr. On 23 Jun 1691, Mercy inexplicably took an ax and struck her son three times in the head. He lingered some six days before succumbing to his injuries. At trial, the husband denied there was any sign of mental illness in Mercy, but neighbors and even Brown's son Joseph had seen odd behavior and language for some time before the murder. She was, however, found guilty and not insane at trial in Oct 1691 and was sentenced to death. Fortunately for Mercy, a strange confluence of events occurred, and she was saved from the executioner. She survived until at least 1695, most likely in a madhouse.

Generations would pass and the Tuttles would survive and thrive. If there were further incidents, they were not saved for posterity. Some Tuttles moved to Morris, New Jersey and then on to Washington County, Pennsylvania, and then to Richland County, Ohio.

Daniel Tuttle and his wife, Phebe Case, were married 21 Nov 1786 in Washington County, Pennsylvania. They had at least seven children, including son Hiram. Hiram and his family went west Iowa, settling in Van Horn County.

Several of the Hiram Tuttle children went on to California and practiced in their various occupations. Morris Burns Tuttle hit the Pajaro Valley and purchased 300 acres and began raising fruit trees and farming hops for beer with one of his brothers. The Pacific Ocean has only the Santa Cruz Mountains between our Tuttles and the surf.



Morris built a beautiful mansion in in south Santa Cruz County in 1899 that still exists today as a private residence. Cousin William Tuttle came down to Santa Cruz County from Rocklin, California in 1911 to stay in Morris' carriage house while he worked out his marital difficulties with his wife Hazel. Hazel was his first cousin and the couple had been wildly in love - at least until their marriage. It was downhill from there, despite the fact they were new parents of daughter Alice. William, a former employee of Southern Pacific railroad, had been unemployed for months. As the New Year of 1912 loomed, he returned home from Santa Cruz County, bought the baby some belated Christmas presents, talked to his wife in the kitchen, and after following her to the bedroom, shot her dead with two shots to the heart. He then shot himself. The baby was found unharmed. Her story would also unfold tragically, and she would die young.

Finally, brother Iowa Tuttle worked with his brother on the farm. He was 44 in 1913 and married with children. He was reportedlly struggling with some financial issues. According to his brother Morris, he had talked about suicide before, so when Iowa did seemingly commit suicide in one of the outbuildings on the Morris Tuttle.

Mansion grounds, it was reportedly no surprise to Morris. Iowa loved his wife and daughters and many did not think his financial woes rose to the level of suicide. The thing was, Iowa had been shot twice in the head. The police talked to Morris quite seriously because it was mighty odd that Iowa was able to fire two bullets into his head before dying, making it all quite suspicious. In the end, Iowa's death was declared a suicide by the coroner. Whether that particular finding had anything to do with Morris' affluence and influence, we will never know.

There are those who say the mansion is filled with the ghosts of Iowa and all the Morris Tuttle descendants who would die tragically young. When in Santa Cruz County, you may want to take a ghost tour of the mansion.

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