

The Janesville Hanging Tree

The kind of tree was not recorded, but it served as a hanging tree for David Mayberry, a convicted murderer with a record of criminal offenses. His victim was Andrew Alger, a Jefferson County man who was working as a logger in Beloit. In Mayberry's presence, Alger made the mistake of bragging about how much money he had made from selling the timber he cut.

Mayberry immediately joined up with him and they traveled to Janesville, where, unknown to Alger, Mayberry purchased a hatchet. They continued on toward Milton and, just three miles short of the town, Mayberry found his opportunity and hacked Alger to death.

Arrested in Rockford, Mayberry was brought back to Janesville for trial. His subsequent conviction in July 1859 stirred a lynch mob to action and they broke into the jail. They were successfully opposed by another faction who felt the course of justice should not be interfered with. The next day, however, the hanging mob returned and this time managed to drag Mayberry from his cell. They hung him from a branch of the tree that stood in the open space in front of the courthouse.

Later, someone cut the tree down, perhaps because of its disconcerting effect on the prisoners.

Source: Maurice Montgomery, Janesville